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implementing spiritual interventions

Axtell, Lee A.

Monterey California. Naval Postgraduate School

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Spiritual Resources for the Pastoral Care and Counseling of the Alcoholic:  
An Approach Implementing Spiritual Interventions.

By

Lee A. Axtell

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Sacred Theology in the Department of Psychology and  
Pastoral Theology at Andover Newton Theological School, and is approved by:

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S. Mark Heim

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Brita L. Gill- Austern

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Date of Approval

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## **INTRODUCTION**

One of the central spiritual issues alcoholics deal with today is a sense of meaninglessness. This thesis will show how the use of three spiritual resources can bring about wholeness in the lives of alcoholics: First is the resource of healing of memories with a primary focus on forgiveness, second is the resource of prayer and meditation, and third is pastoral counseling utilizing narrative theory. These three resources can be transformative interventions for the pastoral care of alcoholics. Through these spiritual resources the alcoholic can rediscover a deeper sense of meaning. When a person has meaning in their life, this means they are connected with three relationships. These three relationships are: 1) the relationship with God; 2) the relationship with society and community; and 3) the relationship with herself or himself. When the spiritual resources in this thesis are implemented into pastoral counseling, these relationships can be reconnected. This then results in a rediscovery of personal meaning. By the time alcoholics determine that their lives are unmanageable they have perhaps ruined their lives and health, and quite possibly the lives of the persons dearest to them. Someone must intervene if lives are to be saved and if people are to become self-respecting, productive citizens again.

My passion in this area stems from a personal experience I had with one of my subordinates. The Chaplain assistant is called a Religious Program Specialist (RP). This position is not gender specific but my RP was male. The situation with him started one

Sunday morning when I came to my ship to hold religious services. The services went on as scheduled and there were no problems at all, I didn't notice anything different.

However, after the services were over the RP asked me if he could speak with me for a moment. He told me that the night before he was out drinking with some of his friends and at around 2:00 A.M. the police picked him up for damage to a civilian's vehicle. He said that he was mistaken for someone else and that he didn't do anything wrong. After a full investigation by local police and an interview by the Naval Criminal Investigation Service, my RP admitted that he was the one, who caused the damage to the vehicle and he was guilty. The RP then began the process of the Navy's legal system called Captain's Mast. He appeared in front of the ships' Captain and was found guilty.

Between the time the criminal act was done to the vehicle and the moment he was found guilty at Captains Mast we went to sea on a 6-month Mediterranean deployment.

The fact that we were deployed complicates the matter. As I mentioned earlier, the Commanding Officer orders the person to an alcoholic rehabilitation center when the person is found guilty. The Navy at sea is working 24 hours a day 7 days a week, so when a crewmember is not doing his (in this case) share of the work then all suffer. My RP was sent off the ship to an alcoholic rehabilitation center in Rota, Spain. The demands on myself as well as the crew back on the ship were accentuated. We all had to do more with less. He was gone for a total of eight weeks, which consisted of the six weeks of the program and two weeks of travel time. Upon his return to the ship and the remaining 3 1/2 months of the deployment, his relationship with the rest of the crew was very difficult. The RP felt there was the continual disconnectedness with the rest of his shipmates because he let them down.

The purpose of this personal story is for me to reflect on my own ministry to the RP during the “repatriation” process. I was able to counsel with him as well as other staff members in the Chaplain’s office and assist in the RP’s transition back to the ship. However, through my academic classes at Andover Newton Theological School and internships at The New England Baptist Hospital and at Boston Christian Counseling Center, I have learned that there is more I could have done in the way of spiritual care of his soul. One of the primary goals I would now set for myself would be to work with him on his journey back to his own sense of meaningfulness. I know that while I could not have helped him avoid his painful experience of the legal system, the spiritual care I provided after he was open to care could have been more.

As a Chaplain I know that the Navy has taken definitive action to alleviate the tragic effect alcohol has on human life, and the subsequent loss of manpower as others have to be trained to fill the job of one who has been removed either because of poor performance or death. Since 1970 the Navy has provided alcohol rehabilitation to a cumulative total of over 92,000 members. Treatment has been effective (measured by satisfactory completion of current enlistment and recommendation for reenlistment for 82% of career personnel who complete inpatient treatment). These statistics demonstrate that a very significant number of Navy members are retrained for service, which otherwise would have been lost.

Patients in the Navy’s treatment centers are ordered there for treatment by their particular command. They are not there by choice. The command’s Collateral Duty Alcoholism Advisor (CODAA), a local alcohol rehabilitation facility, a Human Resource

Management Center or a Counseling and Assistance Center (CAAC) has determined that a problem exists.

Those who serve in the above categories are familiar with Navy requirements and the proper procedure for handling alcoholics/alcohol abusers, in addition to having an understanding of alcoholism. They inform a service member's Commanding Officer that a problem exists. The Commanding Officer, in turn, orders the member into treatment. One period of treatment (six weeks) is mandatory, with a second treatment period permitted in those cases considered warranted – specifically where the individual's performance and conduct have shown improvement. An individual, who, after twice being treated for alcoholism, is still considered by his Command Officer to have failed rehabilitation, is discharged from the Navy in accordance with current regulations. In many instances this action may constitute "crisis intervention" needed for individuals to fully recognize their alcohol problem and thus, in the long run, save their life.

I was very interested in moving my experience from referring alcoholics to the Navy's treatment program system listed above, to an active pastoral care of alcoholics. During my Clinical Pastoral Education Internship at the New England Baptist Hospital (NEBH) and my internship at the Boston Christian Counseling Center (BCCC), I have had the opportunity to observe and to share in the pastoral care of alcoholics. My particular learning through these internships in dealing with alcoholics is to identify and provide pastoral care and counseling to those who suffer from alcoholism. The symptoms of the disease vary with the individual and with the state of progression, but the state of progression was really immaterial to me. I actively confronted alcoholics at any stage to help them stop the progression of their disease.



The goals I set for myself while ministering at BCCC and NEBH in providing pastoral care were all directed towards journeying with the patient to assist bringing about a sense of meaning back into the alcoholic's life. The goals were specific and direct:

- SHORT-TERM GOALS

To help patients learn:

1. That satisfaction and support can be obtained from relating to others, individually as well as in groups;
2. Acceptable methods of relieving tension and anxiety other than alcohol usage.
3. That the patient can restore meaning in their life.

To help patients:

1. Identify tension/anger/frustration-provoking situations;
2. Identify ways of preventing or alleviating feelings of loneliness;
3. Gain confidence, by participating in structured activities that promote people-to-people interactions.

- LONG-TERM GOALS

To help patients accept the fact that:

1. Most of their difficulties are a result of drinking;
2. Alcoholism is an illness in and of itself; and
3. Their lives are unmanageable.

To help patients:

1. Find methods of therapeutic substitutes to supply the needs the alcohol supplied, and
2. Regain self-respect and confidence.
3. Recover meaningfulness in their own lives as well as connect with relationships which might also provide wholeness.

To bring patients hope of arresting alcoholism.

I spent a total of eight hours per week at the BCCC in-group settings and in individual counseling. I spent two days a week, approximately 16 hours per week, at the NEBH visiting patients at the bedside and in our CPE group didactic meetings. Generally speaking, I utilized the material in this paper during the time of my hospital visitations. I saw patients who were in various stages of alcoholism, some had never even realized alcohol was controlling their lives, and others were seasoned veteran Alcoholics Anonymous members. This wide range of acceptance posed no particular problems for me and I learned about myself as I journeyed through their spiritual care with them.

This information should be helpful in conveying the general framework within which my ministry took place. I learned a great deal about myself and about alcoholism during the eight months I ministered to alcoholics. There is, however, a bit more I would like to share about the structure of the paper and my personal contribution to the spiritual issues, which alcoholics deal with. Then I will make a brief comment about my choice of title for this project. Much of this learning is in the first chapter of this paper. My own experience has taught me that I am absolutely ineffective in ministry if I try to share a “program”. I have learned that I am genuine and effective only when I offer myself – my essence, “who I am.” This is what this paper is all about, and is why the chapters unfold

as they do. I have carried a great deal of pain in my life for too long. I have experienced my own sense of meaninglessness, which through counseling with my pastor, I was able to overcome.

Today I feel connected to my life, my relationships, society around me, and most importantly to my relationship with Jesus Christ. I learned experientially that the hurt could be healed, and having experienced this healing, I was free to move on into abundant life which God promises. While working with alcoholics I shared my own grief, fear, loneliness, and meaninglessness, showing them how I moved beyond these millstones. Healing, then, seemed a logical place to begin in my paper. As patients found their inner wholeness, patients began nurturing their inner lives through prayer and meditation, and discovered their own spiritual meaning from day to day, from experience to experience.

With Thomas Merton, I believe that contemplation is the highest expression of one's intellectual and spiritual life. It is the fullness of life itself, aware of and absorbed in and in relation to the source of life. When I offer myself – my presence – to patients, I am offering, from my union with God in Christ, the hope of union and the means and manner in which experiential, spiritual union can be received. It becomes then, for the alcoholic, not so much a turning of life over to God “as I understand Him”, but rather “as I live him”. St. Paul says of his experience, “It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me.” (Galatians 2:20).

I write this thesis as a reflection on my own experience in working with alcoholics as well as a resource for other pastoral counselors. The chapters as a whole are what I found worked well for me at the New England Baptist Hospital and the Boston Christian

Counseling Center while ministering to alcoholics. Each chapter, individually, is a spiritual tool in the pastoral care of alcoholics.

In the first chapter I write about the resource of healing of memories using: forgiveness, the role of memory, and the use of imagination. This chapter is important to start off with because I believe it sets a foundation for working in a counseling context with the alcoholic. Dr. Dean Ornish, in his foreword to *Guided Imagery For Self-Healing* talks about how people must first change their mind if they want to change certain aspects about their lives. He states, “Changing your diet can clearly improve your health, although you must first change your mind before you can change your diet. Changing your approach to life, to love, and to relationships can change your health, but first you have to open your mind and heart to having such changes occur” (Ornish 2000, xi).

Dr. Ornish’s words here are just as appropriate for the alcoholic as they are for the over eater. If an alcoholic wants to change, he or she must first change their mind. In this first chapter my central focus is forgiveness. To start the transformation process, any person must first change their mind about harboring a negative relationship, before they can become open to the forgiveness process. Through the forgiveness process, the alcoholic can begin the healing of memories of wrongs done to them or wrongs they did to others. This healing will lead to meaning in their lives and could bring reconnection.

In the second chapter, I discuss the resource of prayer and meditation. This chapter is important because of the meaninglessness, which is present in our current day. People’s cell phones, pagers, and high speed internet access are running peoples lives, instead of the other way around. A person whose life is focused and is centered in prayer

and meditation should be using the phones, pagers, and internet as resources for their life, not as chains. Utilizing the resources of prayer and meditation brings about reconnection with ones own life, their relationship with God or Higher Power, and ultimately with others in their family and society. These positive reconnections can bring meaning back into the alcoholic's life. The goal in my work with alcoholics in this area is to work with them to integrate into their lifestyle the resource of prayer and meditation. A daily practice of prayer and meditation helps people to get in touch with their own soul. The breathing, the focusing, and the silence of prayer and meditation bring about that state of being which creates an open space for healing and wellness.

The third chapter is a discussion of narrative therapy and why it is such a vital spiritual resource in the pastoral care of alcoholics. To illustrate the application of this theory, I use a counseling session with "Ralph" to show the reader the value of narrative theory. In this chapter I talk about the distinctives of narrative theory and why it has worked well for me in counseling with alcoholics. I site recent research which gives the reader further resources which can be used to followed up on and enhance their own counseling skills.

The last chapter brings my thesis to a conclusion and also provides a brief discussion of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Even before I was assigned to the Navy ship and worked with the RP, whenever I heard about alcoholism one of the first things I thought about was AA. When my Navy deployments were into their fourth of six months at sea, I began AA groups on the ship. There was a need for this because Sailors and Marines would get in trouble with alcohol and would not be allowed to go to shore during subsequent port visits. The groups were very helpful and were a sign to the

command that the person was working on their problem. This also served as a means to regain their liberty in following posts.

AA serves a great purpose as an integrative healing resource along with medical treatment and individual psychotherapy. What AA lacks in their approach is their specific connection of the three spiritual resources in my thesis to the restoration of meaning into a person's life. In the 12 steps, AA talks about the surrendering of a person's inability to control alcohol and the inability to control his or her life. This surrendering is made to a Higher Power. My thesis shows how implementing these three spiritual resources brings meaning back into the alcoholic's life through the journey of reconnection with God, her/himself, and community. During my visit to an AA meeting I was warmly greeted and was amazed at what a wonderful, loving group of people it was. All of them were there to reconnect with meaning in their own lives. They were there to rediscover the soul that they once had before alcohol took control of their lives.

One of the primary characteristics of AA I talk about, in my brief introduction of the resource, is that of being assigned a sponsor. The assignment of a sponsor brings about the immediate reconnection with another person. One of the short-term goals my supervisor and I set for myself at NEBH was to show alcoholics how to reconnect with meaning in their lives. AA does this by providing a sponsor. The second aspect of AA, which is so wonderful is the sponsor then has their sponsoree state that they cannot make this transformation out of a life of meaninglessness happen on their own. The sponsoree then surrenders to a higher power in search of meaning for their life. The beginning of surrendering to a higher power is the actual decision to make that specific change in their life. To begin the transformation process to meaning, a person must make a decision to

change their mind about their current situation. The spiritual resource, which assists a person in this transformation journey, begins with a healing of memories. Please journey with me now through the spiritual resources, which I have chosen to talk about in this work.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE RESOURCE OF HEALING OF MEMORIES

*I came that they may have life*

*and have it abundantly.*

John 10:10

My purpose in this chapter is to examine in some detail the psychological and spiritual dynamics of inner healing, or the healing of memories, and to see how this healing relates to the recovery of human wholeness and a life of meaning. One of the primary spiritual resources in the healing of memories is the use of forgiveness. I will also relate the central role of forgiveness to the role of memory and the use of imagination.

When Jesus, with compassion, declared, *your faith has made you well* to the sick woman, and when he healed scores of others, he was offering them the fullness of life, not just release from a physical ailment. When he shared his healing ministry, those who were healed and those who were witnesses realized that he cured more than obvious physical afflictions. His healing act became a redemptive act, one that elicited a self-acceptance and wholeness in the lives of those he healed. Healing, which expresses the salvation God offers us, is an act of God's personal compassionate love extending throughout one's whole life. This act is a transforming, connecting experience.

I have seen in my own ministry how freedom from illness, from a compulsion or from a prejudice has opened new vistas for serving others in love. I see healing as a



process that leads us to attitudes of body, mind, emotion and spirit that foster compassion and self-giving. Despair, jealousy, anger, and guilt no longer possess one who has received the loving embrace of our Lord, and one is compelled to embrace others in the same way.

I see inner healing as the redemptive work of Christ reaching to the depths of our subconscious mind. Through the power of the Holy Spirit our total person is blessed with such love that we are freed from guilt and pain to participate with God more fully in the building of His Kingdom on earth. Such healing leads to self-acceptance (including one's limitations as well as one's gifts); to acceptance of reality as it is by uncovering lies about one's own self and the world; and to freedom to experience and express the abundant life.

My focus is on the relationship between the subconscious blocks resulting from past hurts, fears, and all distortions of reality (due to primary lack or absence of love) and our co-operative role with the energy of the Holy Spirit in removing these blocks so that we can move deeper into a relationship of union with God, others and the world around us. Archbishop Desmond Tutu in his foreword to *Exploring Forgiveness* says:

I am a person because I belong. The same is true for you. The solitary human being is a contradiction in terms. That is why God could say to Adam, "It is not good for man to be alone. No one can be fully human unless he or she relates to others in a fair, peaceful and harmonious way. In our African understanding, we set great store by communal peace and harmony. Anything that subverts this harmony is injurious, not just to the community, but to all of us, and therefore forgiveness is an absolute necessity for continued human existence (Tutu 1998, xiii).

As we realize this connection in relationship of self and community, which Desmond Tutu talks about, the harmony of our sense of meaningfulness returns to our lives.

While method and theory vary among healers who practice the spiritual therapy of inner healing, there are common themes. These themes call into reason the psychological and spiritual dynamics, which are necessary to bring about the healing process. My discussion will center around three of these:

- The central role of forgiveness.
- The role of memory and its relationship to the unconscious.
- The use of imagination and its relationship to both prayer and faith.

#### The Central Role of Forgiveness.

We know experientially that the way of entry into the healing love of Christ is through forgiveness, both passively receiving it and actively giving it. One of the central roles of forgiveness in the healing of the alcoholic is seen in the alcoholic owning their pain. Their pain results in meaninglessness but is manifested in their inability to understand it or own it. In their frantic lives of searching for their next drink or the longevity over which the sickness has developed in their lives, they are unaware that a cause of their disconnection is unacceptance of pain. Louis Smedes says in his book, “Forgiving is a remedy for pain, but not for anybody else’s pain, just our own. But no pain is really our pain until we own it.” He makes clear the relationship of owning to possessing by saying, “We possess something when we get hold of it in a way the law prescribes. We own something when we take personal responsibility for it.”

He gives five steps, which are important to list here, because they certainly apply to the alcoholic but can also be applied to anyone else. The five steps to take personal responsibility for pain are: 1) we appropriate it. That is, we make something a property of ourselves; 2) we acknowledge it. We own up to ownership. We don’t conceal it; we

let people know that we are responsible for it (we see this in AA meetings when people introduce themselves as an alcoholic); 3) we name it. Naming a thing gives it a special identity in the world. We name it so that anybody can know what it is and what it is for; 4) we evaluate it. We take stock of it, get a sense of its worth to us; 5) we take responsibility for it. We make ourselves accountable for what happens to it. We fix it if it is broken, buy insurance for it, and hold ourselves answerable for what happens to it while we own it (Smedes 1996, 129). Before the alcoholic can enter into the process of forgiveness, they must first understand this central issue of recognizing and owning their pain. When they own pain, they can then specifically name what it is they must give or get forgiveness for.

In addition to the theme of owning pain, there are three types of negative emotional reactions that do damage to the human psyche and form the syndrome of the disturbed personality. These are: 1) anger, due to resentment or the inability to forgive those who caused pain (this resentment can be buried deep within the subconscious mind); 2) guilt, *i.e.*, true moral guilt created by sin (not simply guilty feelings); and 3) anxiety, which is a state resulting from unresolved anger and guilt (Thompson 2001 b). These negative emotions can be erased as we release them through forgiveness.

Jesus' teaching, which underpins the therapeutic approach of forgiveness, is modeled most profoundly in the prayer He taught His disciples. Matthew recorded the prayer, and in Matthew 16:1-14 we read:

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. For if you forgive...your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you forgive not...neither will your Father forgive.

This prayer of our Lord illuminates the deepest mystery and law of the Kingdom of God. Our ability to know God's forgiveness as a reality in our experience is conditional and proportional based on our willingness and ability to give forgiveness to those who hurt us.

Lacking the willingness to forgive has brought lingering grief to one of the members of a church I once served. Some years ago she married against the advice and wishes of family and friends, and then struggled to make the marriage seem a happy one. Those years were unhappy ones. Six years after the wedding her husband was killed, leaving her with four small children to raise. At the time of the funeral and for some time afterward, she carried scorn for many, "you didn't support me when I married him, so I don't need you now."

She then moved geographically and emotionally from family and friends and kept pretty much to herself. Her husband was killed about twelve years ago and I know, as I keep in distant contact with church members, that this woman is as bitter today as she ever was. Despite all efforts to help her experience some peace of mind and contentment, she is today a bitter woman. She has been unwilling and unable to forgive those who opposed her marriage. *"...if you forgive not..."*

Smedes says that Forgiving is an "ought" of opportunity. I pray that one day this woman, this child of God, will be able to follow what Smedes states:

I think that when God says we ought to forgive, he intends something like this: "I have discovered a better way to deal with your memory of wrongful pain. It is an opportunity to do yourself a world of good. It will also put you in shape to do some good for the clod who hurt you and for a lot of other people besides. I call it forgiving. You really *ought* to try it."

The alternative to forgiving--getting even--only makes the pain last longer and feel worse. Even if we cause our enemy the worst pain

we can think of, we don't feel any better for it. A sip of sweet revenge, maybe, but with no lasting joy in it. So forgiving is an opportunity to do something beneficial for ourselves and for other people in the bargain (Smedes 1996, 67).

Jesus tells another parable to illustrate the necessity of forgiveness to experience the abundant life. The parable of the wicked servant (Matthew 18:23-35) likens the Kingdom of God to the king who had compassion on his servant and released him from his debt. That same servant left the presence of the merciful king and found a fellow servant who was indebted to him, and demanded that he pay in full what was owed. The king found out that this forgiven servant had acted thus toward his brother, and condemned him to torment until he paid the original debt. The parable ends: Likewise shall my Heavenly Father do also to you, if you from your hearts forgive not everyone of your brothers for their trespasses.

The intended goal in the healing of memories is to experience a level of forgiveness that comes from the depths of the unconscious, or the heart, as it is prescribed in the Lord's Prayer. This involves both receiving forgiveness from God and, in turn, giving forgiveness to others, recreating connection and meaning, with the same depth and unconditional quality as we received it.

There are different types of forgiveness models, which can be utilized to assist people in their forgiveness journey.<sup>1</sup> I prefer to use, as my model, a structure that was created by Dr. J. Earl Thompson. There are four phases of forgiveness, which are generally experienced as one re-enacts through active-imagination painful, hurtful

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<sup>1</sup> For one other example see Enright, Freedman and Rique (1998).

memories, and relives them through a consciousness of Christ's love in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

First, in the "uncovering phase," as we confront in our imagination the person who hurt us, or deprived us of love, we experience the negative rejection we felt at that time. Both the content and the accompanying emotion are relived with all of the hurtful impact upon our psyche. There is no separation in our conscious mind between the action performed and the person behind the action. Thus we hold and harbor resentment and see the individual in a negative, destructive light, and channel negative energy to that individual. One would ask in this phase, "Has my view of the justice of God or the universe changed?"

The second stage, "understanding phase" of forgiveness brings us to the point of attempting to connect with the wrongdoer. One would try and find out what family forces and life experiences have shaped him or her. It is in this stage that the first development of compassion can occur. On the basis of what one knows about the wrongdoer, can the victim cultivate any compassion for the wrongdoer? In this phase we discover we are called to be holy not as some form of superhuman exercise or great strength nor as an exercise of sanctimoniousness; rather, our holiness is to be a reflection of our gratitude for God's forgiving love for us and friendship with us" (Jones 1995, 168). Jones' testimony here gives the hurting one the freedom to regain holiness as he or she accepts the pain and shame of the hurt. We are no longer enemies, but the love of God has not yet flowed out of us toward that person.

The third phase, "decision phase" takes place when we allow Christ to embrace both ourselves, and the one who hurt us, in an act of mutual forgiving love. At this point

we receive a “heart transplant”, a new heart, and become channels of God’s Holy Spirit, loving, creating and recreating the world of relationships in which we are interdependently and vitally connected. This is an act of profound self- transcendence in which we are united with God in consciousness, viewing the world of persons not as a problem, but as an opportunity to love more deeply. We share in the life of God, which is living in and through others by loving them. Our heart and mind have become so united with Christ (our unconscious and conscious have been brought together) that we are able to experience the gift of God’s loving energy that is now more real to us than the evil we experienced with our senses. I will say more about this union with God in the following chapter.

The fourth and final stage, “solidifying and deepening the decision to forgive” moves the victim to realize that he or she has also needed the forgiveness of others. The injured discovers fresh meaning for self and perhaps a new purpose in life as a result of suffering and the process of forgiveness. This new purpose *is* new meaning, meaningfulness, a reconnection with oneself and those around me. The injured makes tentative and exploratory steps toward reconciliation (Thompson 2001 a).

Carl Jung in an interview is asked if he believes there is a God and he answers, “I know there is a God, I don’t just believe, I know” (Jung 1963, 46). Utilizing the same “depths of the soul” conscious affirmation as Jung used, an alcoholic can claim to know forgiveness as new meaning and connectedness for him or her. When I am faced with reconciliation, I find comfort as well as challenge in Worthington’s statement, “Just as estrangement becomes the occasion for forgiving, the reconciliation of the estranged

becomes the goal. This is not to say that forgiving is of no value unless reconciliation is achieved” (Worthington 1998, 350).

In the healing process of forgiveness, we work on our memories of the hurt and pain. This hurt and pain could be something we did to someone else or it could be something that was done to us. Never the less, that event is embedded in our memories, and it is there that we have to tap our forgiveness journey. As the alcoholic journeys through owning pain, resolving emotions and going through the steps of forgiveness, he or she can do this by entering into and sharing the unconditional love of God. Our own field of consciousness is expanded as we experience the quality of love, which forms the ground of reality. In this personal transformation we participate in the redemptive process in life’s relationships. We are not only transformed, but we become transforming agents, co-creators and co- redeemers by virtue of our becoming “partakers of the Divine nature” spoken of in II Peter 1:4. We become vehicles of God’s creative Holy Spirit through the channel opened up by forgiveness.

This deep level of healing and redemption can and does take place every time we celebrate the Lord’s Supper “in memory” of Christ. The Greek word for remembrance as translated in I Corinthians 11:32-36 is *anamnesis*, which means a re-living, a re-presenting and active participation in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. More than a recalling of a past event, the sacrament of communion involves the present and future as well. It is a dynamic and creative act involving loving forgiveness, which then leads to wholeness.

### The Role of Memory



The writer of Proverbs says *as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he* (Proverbs 23:7, KJ). In *The Case for Spiritual Healing*, Don Gross equates the heart with the unconscious, which he describes as *the great crossroads that links all the other aspects of the personality together* (Gross 1978, 159). Through my class in Analytical Psychology, I believe the unconscious can hold and keep a memory active even though our conscious mind has “resolved” the issue for some time. In Clinical Pastoral Education at the NEBH I often spoke with alcoholic patients about this issue. The alcoholic states that, “yes, she did forgive her husband however, they have still not spoken since *the* incident.” As I reflected on her statement, we entered into a dialogue if her memory was truly clear on the point that forgiveness had occurred. This inability to really resolve what is in our unconscious drains us of vital energy, and is the cause of much unneeded suffering.

There is, I believe, a creative energy in the unconscious that is striving for wholeness and the integration of the personality. This energy becomes blocked because we have reacted to painful experiences with attitudes of resentment and anger, both of which lead to anxiety because of our lack of forgiving. These emotions and experiences can express the dark, inferior aspect of our personality. Until a person becomes willing to face this shadow side, the unconscious does not open, and the forces of healing are locked within. Drs. Connie Zweig and Steve Wolf describe the term shadow in three different ways:

First, the shadow is the darkroom in which our images and dreams lie dormant. Shadow-work is the process of development in which our images and dreams come back to life. Second, it refers to the contents themselves, those archetypal images that are immediately, intuitively recognizable as a troubling part of us: a witch sadist, saboteur, victim, addict, or liar. In addition, we are calling those latent talents and positive impulses shadow content that were banished in childhood, such as musical, poetic, or athletic talents.

Finally used as an adjective, the term refers to the shadow aspect or dark side of a person or archetype, such as the dark side of one's mother or the dark side of the Great Mother. Because most of us are trained as children to split off God from Satan and good from evil, we cannot hold the tension of these opposites: light side and dark side. Instead, we tend to seek out untarnished, idealized heroes in an attempt to remain optimistic and hopeful. Or another part of us, which is jaded and cynical, expects the worst of others (Zweig and Wolf 1997, 18).

Drs. Zweig and Wolf, in their definitions, touch on the very aspect of this sense of meaninglessness, which an alcoholic can have. The origin of an alcoholic's meaninglessness can come from a dream which has been kept dormant, or possibly from an alcoholic parent who banished the creative art talent and pressed the child into a world of business, or even a spouse whose hopes and dreams were placed in a seemingly untarnished hero, only to have that hero walk out one day. This is perhaps the simplest, yet most profound, way of expressing the spiritual and psychological components of inner healing.

There is an additional aspect of memory, along with its role and function in the unconscious that gives us an insight into the relationship between the healing of memories and human wholeness. Alfred Adler states as the goal of healing therapy the discovery of an individual's life goal, *i.e.*, that for which she or he is striving in life (Adler 1958, 71-73). Early recollected memories, according to Adler, support and direct the goal of the individual's personality; "There are no indifferent or non-sensical recollections, but every memory serves as a reminder that each person carries within him/herself an ability to both limit and give meaning to present life circumstances."

Memories are in a sense "our story" which we repeat to ourselves to confront the present and to prepare us to meet the future (I will specifically talk about how "one's

story” is used in chapter 3 on narrative theory). It is not the specific experience only, which affects our lives, but our perception of the experience. Pastoral counseling, utilizing the three resources in this paper, as well as the many other resources, must take into consideration a person's holistic self. Pastoral counseling must not treat simply the isolated memory (painful or otherwise), but also see those memories in relation to the whole direction of a person's life goal in its meaning and value. This is one reason why my supervisor in Clinical Pastoral Education, Dr. Effie Sidiropoulou, challenged me create a list of learning goals and discuss how these goals integrated the patients' search for meaning for their lives, in the hospital.

Dr. Pelletier talks about research, which I believe underscores the importance of a holistic approach in the care of the mind, body and soul. The research shows the connection in psychoneuroimmunology, which means the research of the investigation of the interactions between the mind (psycho) and the brain and central nervous system (neuro) and the body's biochemical resistance to disease and abnormal cell development (immunology) (Pelletier 2000, xiii). I think about the three parts of Dr. Pelletier's discussion and I remember, in my own memory, how I related this psycho/neuro example to a vivid example regarding suicide. While I was in ministry at the Marine Corps Boot Camp in San Diego, CA (Sep 98-June 01), I counseled many Marine Recruits around their suicidal gestures. During my counseling I used the illustration of the grooves on an automobile break pad to assist them in externalizing their gestures. Once the groove started, the break clamp would continue to dig deeper into the disc, ultimately rendering the disc inoperable for its primary meaning. Not even a good turning of the rotors would erase the mark that was left on the disc. In the healing of memories, the loving energy of

the Holy Spirit smoothes out our rotors and creates new grooves through our re-experiencing those painful and hurtful life events. This time the grooves are from the consciousness of a relationship with God, or Higher Power. This is possible through faith and prayer as we relive the events of our life in and with the love of the Holy Spirit.

The infant, child and adolescent were once, and are still, living inside us through our memory and the powerful archetypes of the collective unconscious. As they live they seek to resolve the problems and pain that were not adequately dealt with at the time they occurred. Parts of us still seek, whether or not we are aware of these parts and their search, to atone for previously incurred guilt, to find solutions to unresolved problems, and to experience love for all the times we needed love but did not find it (Burton 2002)<sup>2</sup>.

I believe, with others who practice inner healing, that only re-living an experience can heal, just as it was an experience that hurt us. As we relive these events and seek wholeness and meaning we should not do this alone. Thus the pastoral counselor is vital when working with the role of memory in the unconscious and in the journey of the alcoholic patient towards reestablishing meaning in his or her life.

### The Use of Imagination

The role of the imagination cannot be underestimated in the healing process. Imagination is that area of the mind, which gives form to our thoughts, and makes it possible for us to work on those images. One cannot read the great mystics or people of prayer without seeing that imagination is the window to the world of the spirit. This spirituality of the mystics emphasizes being and includes historic persons such as Teresa

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<sup>2</sup> Norma Burton, Mdiv., MTS, healer, psychotherapist, from Santa Fe, New Mexico. She was a guest lecturer in the Winterim class, *Analytical Psychology*. Norma's work helped us to engage our shadow sides

of Avila, John of the Cross, and Thomas Merton. Their purpose is to occupy and free the mind so that one may dwell with God (Westerhoff 1994, 57). Imagination wells up in the depth of personality where human spirit and Holy Spirit meet. Imagination is a focal point of many faculties of the mind around which revolve will, hope and faith. It is through imagination that we enter the world of faith. Carl Jung uses the term “active-imagination” to describe the step beyond imaginative meditation. In active-imagination the ego, or self, is not simply an observer to imagined events, but an active participant, interacting with the images and symbols that arise from the unconscious. This process of deep inner dialogue brings the conscious and the unconscious into closer proximity through a kind of reconciliation that is the necessary state for creative change and psychological integration to occur (Jung 1976, 171) .

What differentiates Christian spiritual therapies from other types of meditative healing that employ similar techniques is that Christ is present in and with the self as he or she takes this journey back into the past of painful memories. At all times during the therapeutic meditation, the person is asked to imagine, to “picture”, Christ and to realize His presence there in that specific hurtful situation where there was rejection due to withheld love, either actual or perceived. In this state, the person is encouraged to open the deepest levels of the self and to receive Jesus’ love as He is giving it unconditionally to that specific individual. The dynamic that occurs during this process is one of catharsis that moves beyond psychological explanation into the spiritual dimension of life. The dynamic is precisely what Jesus experienced in His passion, through which God “in the flesh” experienced the wholeness of our life. Dobson, in his book states, “By

Christ's reaction to creative loving energy and forgiveness, He altered sin, actually transforming it into positive energy" (Dobson 1978, 149).

In imagining His presence in our experience we enter into union, heart to Heart. We experience a healing love as we are transformed by His love. St. Paul expresses it, *if anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation* (II Corinthians 5:17).

I vividly recall a personal experience of several years ago when I participated in a healing of memories workshop. I was asked to imagine myself in a room where I felt perfectly comfortable and quiet, and after experiencing deep peace in my surroundings, was then asked to invite Christ to join me. I felt my entire body growing warm, and sensed that I was engulfed in light when Christ entered the room. I have not felt as loved and treasured as I did then. After some moments the leader suggested there was a knock on the door. When I opened the door, my sister was standing there. Our relationship for five or six years prior to this experience was one of anger and mistrust, yet when I saw her, I was overcome with a deep love for her. I invited her to come in and join us, and during the remainder of the experience she and I were one. I do not recall that we actually spoke, but in those moments I knew who she was and understood her behavior, and knew she was relating to me in the same way. There was love, forgiveness and understanding in abundance, all the while we both basked in the penetrating love of Christ.

Our relationship over this time of five years was detached as brother and sister and, because of this emotional separation, I also felt as though my ties to my whole family were therefore disconnected. During this time it was a lack of forgiveness, which I manifested in my gut. Being unable to forgive created a jumble of emotions. Some of

those emotions I carried were hatred, bitterness, resentment and anger; these were all interlaced in the tapestry of the lack of forgiveness in my life. Worthington gives a great definition of forgiveness. He says it is the emotional replacement of 1) hot emotions of anger or fear that follow a perceived hurt or offense, or 2) the emotional state that follows ruminating about the transgression, by substituting positive emotions such as love, empathy, compassion, or even romantic love (Worthington 2001, 32-33). During this experience of forgiveness, through imagining wholeness with my sister, I replaced the hate and bitterness with positive thoughts and feelings. Worthington states there are two ways to forgiveness either by chipping away at the emotions of unforgiveness or by replacing the emotions all at once. I know that my experience was forgiveness all at once in a corrective emotional experience (Worthington 2001, 35). I asked Christ to help me release those feelings to restore my love for her. I asked Him to forgive me of all the ungodly feelings I held in this relationship. I asked to be released of those feelings and that I might enter into prayer over the situation with a heart He had set right. I needed no reciprocation from her, though outwardly by our closer relationship I had received her forgiveness. This forgiveness has restored our relationship as well as my connectedness with the rest of my family. I have a new sense of meaning in our time when we gather together as a family either during holidays or even as we connect on the phone, coast to coast, as we are doing during my time at Andover Newton Theological School.

I have not shared this experience with her, yet, with minor exceptions, our relationship from that day till now has been one of a shared love. The anger with which I perceived her was overpowered by my forgiveness of her acts. I believe I understand who she is and why she angered me so, and I love her deeply. Just as important, however, is the

change in her attitude and the manner in which she shows love for me. I cannot help but believe that she also experienced a healing of memories, even though she did not attend the workshop. There was a connectedness in the union of my heart to His Heart, which expanded my connectedness in love for my sister heart to heart. I could not have done without God's healing hand of love – without God showing me forgiveness first. Prayer from a right heart is essential in forgiveness when we ask to be forgiven of our sins and released of any ungodly thoughts and feelings. I experienced an overwhelming healing love, which transformed me in such a way that I could understand, and love one who had been a constant source of irritation and grief.

On numerous occasions in my sessions with alcoholic patients I have led them through similar experiences of healing, asking them to imagine situations and persons they remember with pain, asking only that they invite their Higher Power to join them. The drama of such encounters has been deeply moving. Nearly all of them shared with me the deep resentments and hate they have held toward, for instance, parents, and their obsession to “pay their parents back”. And though the details of their experiences differed, those who shared with me told of warmth and light and love, followed by a desire and willingness to share this love, most often with the person they felt had hurt them the most. They found their way to inner healing and meaningfulness through love and forgiveness.

Memories then are not simply past events that need to be healed by Christ's love so that we might become ourselves freer and more integrated persons. To speak of the healing of memories in relation to wholeness is to see memory as our capacity to transcend the limitations of our past and present situations. This is a vital area, which I



have come to experience journeying with alcoholics from a sense of meaninglessness to a sense of meaning. We enter the creative dimension of the Spirit, where together with God we give shape both to ourselves and to our world by the very way in which we hold our memory.

Writer C. S. Lewis speculates about the relationships of memory and the resurrection of the body. As we possess the ability to raise past sense experiences, so our bodies (our total sense experience) will also be raised. He writes,

Memory as we know it is a dim foretaste, a mirage even, of a power which the soul, or rather Christ in the soul, will exercise in the hereafter. At present we tend to think of the soul as somehow “inside” the body. But the glorified body of the resurrection as I conceive it – the sensuous life raised from the dead – will be inside the soul, as God is not in space, but space in God.

Matter enters our experience only by becoming sensation or conception – that is, become soul. The element in the soul, which it becomes, will, in my view, be raised and glorified; the Hill and Valley of Heaven will be to those who now experience it not as a copy is to an original, nor as a substitute to the original article, but as a flower to the root, or the diamond to the coal. It will be eternally true that they originate with matter, but matter, by being perceived and known, has turned into soul.

Then the earth and sky, the same, yet not the same as these, will rise in us as we have risen in Christ. And once again, after who knows what eons of silence and the dark, the birds will sing and the water flow, and lights and shadows move across the hills, and faces of our friends laugh upon us with amazed recognition (Lewis 1964, 155-158).

If Lewis is near the truth in his speculations, then perhaps we can say that God has committed himself so fully to redeem humanity that whatever the new heaven and new earth will be, will depend upon the forms and structures that we supply through our faith, hope, and love, as it is taken up into Christ. Perhaps our memories are part of the solid stuff, the building blocks of a reality that we now see only through a glass dimly.

Our connection to human wholeness, then, is not simply ours, but something for the whole creation, that stands on tip-toe awaiting the final day of revelation of God.

CHAPTER 2

**THE RESOURCE OF PRAYER AND MEDITATION**

*As a deer  
Longs  
For flowing streams*

*My soul  
Longs  
For thee, O God*

Psalms 42:1

A widespread sense of meaninglessness pervades the twentieth century, and especially, I think, the Generation Xers and the Millennium Generation. Other generations experienced this, of course, but it does not appear to be as apparent in times past as in our own experience. There is such a hunger to find what life is all about. Who am I? What is happening to me? Why? Where are we headed? Why? During the Ecumenical Thanksgiving Day Worship Service at the New England Baptist Hospital, I preached about Hezekiah in Isaiah, Chapter 38. I preached about how Hezekiah turned his head to the wall and prayed, wept bitterly, and then asked the age-old question, “why?” This “why” which Hezekiah asked God so long ago is still relevant for us in this day and age.

Many of our fellow travelers on this earth are looking for life’s meaning for they are without a sense of purpose or direction. We seem to be searching for meaning in a fast-forward mode. Not only do we have fast food chains, quick checks, instant foods

and replays, but also we hurry our education, our growing up, our relationships. We have created machines to make analyses for us, to hurry our thinking. We suffer from jet lag. We suffer from the emotional drain of a frenetic pace. Alcoholics go from place to place searching for a connection to life. They search is hurried for their next drink but never find it. Their focus is not on reality but unconsciously maintaining their search for wholeness, never finding it on their own. Their families become involved in their frenetic pace. Thomas Merton states very appropriately, “People are in a hurry to magnify themselves by imitating what is popular, and too lazy to think of anything better. Hurry ruins saints as well as artists. And when the madness is upon them they argue that their very haste is a species of integrity” (Merton 1961, 98). This is a one example of societal meaninglessness and disconnectedness.

The fast forward mode is most apparent in the younger generation who seem to rush out into the world in a frenzy, frantic at the thought of spending time without alcohol, drugs, or sex, expecting to find meaning and purpose in an experience “out there”. When cellular telephones ring during wedding ceremonies, and pagers beep during a funeral service for their own loved one, this shows people are too hurried to even settle and be able to take in, in a contemplative state, the most intimate of faith services. To further show the rate at which society is hurried and unable to slow for personal connection, in January 2002 the state of New Hampshire redefined reckless driving to include traffic offenses created by talking on the phone, eating while driving, or other wise distracted from the focus of driving. This mode is not the younger generation exclusively. It encompasses all generations and strata of society which I personally experience as I visit patients in the New England Baptist Hospital and counsel

clients at the Boston Christian Counseling Center. There is no need to enlarge on the widely recognized fact that a sense of personal malaise is on the increase among even the most highly educated and economically secure members of our society. As an ever larger number of these people resort to psychotherapists in order to rid their personalities of neuroses, phobias, and an assortment of lesser disturbances, or turn to alcohol and drugs, astrology or palm reading for answers, one is led to suspect that our society has become a breeding ground of unhappiness and desperation.

If we are to restore wholeness to society we must cease our frenetic searching. Jesus' words, *the Kingdom of God is within you* are not only divine revelation, but also the actualized experience of those who quietly looked within themselves to find God, and who found everything else they need for life.

We need today to discover the reality and value of our inner life, to find an answer to the question, "who am I?" The daily need of our soul is to see meaning in life, and to make a satisfying connection to the world around us. Each of us needs to be at peace with ourselves and in harmony with persons and situations that impact upon us. What is most urgent is perhaps not so much to actualize one's self as to transcend it. People have a need for integration – personal, educational, social and spiritual – that transcends the merely palliative effects of most psychiatry. For example, the ideal of self-actualization, promulgated by Maslow, is not fully expressive of humankind's deepest needs. One who has fulfilled every secular need can still feel isolated in an alien world. Each of us knows what St. Augustine expressed when he wrote, *our souls are restless till they find their rest in Thee*.

What is imperative in order to realize life's meaning is to transcend one's aloneness and to belong to the whole. Alcoholics can find wholeness and connection when they realize their integration with the divine, which is God. Rod Romney, in his book *Journey to Inner Space* speaks to this disconnection of alcoholics in their endless searching for meaning. He says that it is not so much that God is illusive, it is that the search for God is conducted in all the wrong places and in the wrong ways. With this formula of searching, the integration which people search for, is always just out of reach.

The wealthy dowager or the jaded playboy, jetting to the ends of the earth in an irresponsible quest for pleasure, is really in search of God. The tired businessman, who is willing to give a marathon encounter group a try, as well as the suburban housewife, whose longing for personal fulfillment and excitement often drive her to alcohol or an affair, is equally hungry for God. The junkie who 'shoots up' and the prostitute who "shacks up" are making desperate attempts to find God. Those we meet on the street are crying out for God, and every act of lawlessness, promiscuity and prodigality is an anguished striving for God. The heart of humanity is literally weeping for God (Romney 1980, 37).

Many do not know why they are unhappy or what it is they feverishly seek. They attach themselves to habits, creatures and things; yet every finite attachment leads to increased disappointment and frustration because these are not enough. Daily I see in my contacts with alcoholic patients those who choose to hold on to life as they know it, repeating their cycle of guilt, loneliness and bitterness, and those who surrender their lives to God (as they understand God or Higher Power/spirit), bathing themselves in their new-found life. The best way to illustrate this is through a story of an alcoholic pastor who was aware of his problem and knew he needed to make a change. After joining in the fellowship of AA, he became connected in faith and sobriety and stated, "I'm glad I'm an alcoholic...Alcoholics Anonymous' spirituality has done more for me and for

many clergymen than religion has. I am indeed weller than well” (Kuss 1995, 36). Things we attach ourselves to are not enough. God is.

How can we find God? This question comes from the lips of seekers as an agonized prayer. I cannot remember the number of times someone has asked me this question. My reply has always been, “Through meditation and prayer.” However, we will not find God through the traditional forms and patterns of prayer that most of us learned. We must seek to understand Jesus’ pattern of prayer and His teachings on the inner life and seek to pattern our own life in the manner He showed us, entering the realm of the mystical, experiential spiritual life.

Mystical life is not one that is unreal or having to do with visions of some spiritual oasis in another world. Rather it is a life experience in which the subject/object relationship is transcended, in which there is complete focus of the subject with other human beings, with the universe in general and with God. Jesus was essentially a mystic, one who explored the deeper recesses of his inner being and knew Himself to be the Son of God. He saw the world through God’s eyes; therefore, he could acknowledge no human hierarchies or divisions. He saw all things as perfectly whole and unitive in the way God had originally created them. His goal was to restore all things to that intended perfection. He called people to rise up out of their little selves into a larger life, a larger love, as sons and daughters of the Infinite Father. His invitation: *Come, follow me. I am the way to God.*

Scriptures allude in numerous places to the idea that Jesus had an inner life that he nurtured quietly and privately. He retreated to the hills away from everyone for times of inner refilling, sometimes for as much as a full night (See Luke 6:12). He arose before

daybreak and sought out a lonely place to pray in order to meet the growing demands being placed on Him by multitudes who followed after Him (Mark 1:35). Frequently those disciples who must have been privy to them recorded His prayers. Woven into the biblical picture of Jesus was the habit of a man who had learned a rhythm of life, a rhythm of going into the quiet hours of meditation, prayer and rest, to be followed by the rhythm of going out to bless and heal human needs. I can only hope that one day I will be able to maintain the same spiritual practices that Jesus implemented in His life.

The theme throughout Dr. Kirk Jones' book, *Rest In The Storm*, is to find my own place in the back of the boat where I can find quiet time for my own spirituality. This is where I find my own spiritual rhythm, my meaningfulness and my connectedness. There are several texts where Jesus is practicing his "margin". Jones illustrates the topic of "margin" as the time that someone takes for spiritual reflection. The Biblical texts show that Christ usually took time for his "margin" the early morning (Jones 2001, 26). I reflect, just for a moment, in Chapter 3 in this thesis, where I utilize Narrative therapy with the alcoholic person I interviewed. Ralph states that his new story is to start his morning off with prayer instead of his usual bottle of beer. This is the alcoholic's time to practice his margin. This is part of his rhythm.

The disciples observed that when Jesus retreated from them for this inner journey, He always returned revitalized and renewed. They noted a fresh power and zeal about Him, a calm sense of direction and a deep inner peace that marked His life with a new quality. One day when He returned from praying, one of them said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray". Jesus then gave a prayer, one whose richly textured framework offers another key to open still more doors to the fullness of life. It brings us into union of



peace and joy with the Father through a prayer that supersedes the use of our mental activity, for it becomes God praying through us.

We cannot attain this peace and joy only with our minds. We cannot reach God through our minds. Many have tried and failed. We can reach God in absolute stillness when the mind is transcended. The mystic who wrote *The Cloud of Unknowing* knew that God is not attained through knowledge or reasoning. God is attained through that consciousness described as unknowing. This is not a state of ignorance. It is a state of being, where the mind is at rest and the soul fully embraces God. One example of this type of prayer, which I use with alcoholics to gain this type of transcendence, is centering prayer.

At this point in my thesis I make the connection about why centering prayer is vital to the pastoral care of alcoholics. However, at the end of this chapter, I give a detailed example of how I share Centering Prayer with alcoholics and the impact it makes on their search for meaning. The whole of the prayer is actually contained in the first step, attending in faith and love to God, present at the center, or ground, of our being (Pennington 1980, 215). We do almost anything in this world with our minds except reach God.

Experiencing oneness with God, which Jesus consecrated as a human possibility, is the goal of prayer and meditation. The “how” of this inner journey will always be varied to suit the needs and references of the journeyer. Each must find their way that seems best. To get lost in the techniques is to miss the journey altogether. What is important is to know that the experience of the inner journey, is essentially an experience

for all: a sense of oneness with God and a deep, abiding sense of joy, peace and love that overflows into all of life.

As a Chaplain, I must hold strong to my ethical boundaries where I allow each person I speak with, to find and worship God in their own way. In the book *Spirituality and Chemical Dependency* Kus says, “Treating professionals also need to be aware of and sensitive to the many different paths other people of different ethnic or cultural or philosophical backgrounds may successfully take” (Kus 1995, 47). Alcoholics have different paths to recovery as well as to their God, or what Alcoholics Anonymous defines as Higher Power. One of my goals in my Learning Contract with my BCCC supervisor, Dr. Gerald Wyrwas, is to continue to watch myself to not impose my evangelical position on my clients. I do this by respecting their space and their own faith journey. Prayer, our inner journey, is not the possession of a chosen few, but is rather the heritage of all, the essential means of living the Christian life and coming to that personal union with God for which we were created.<sup>1</sup>

Meditation is a way of being in the world, not a way of getting out of it. Our prayer-meditation life does not remove us from the world around us. It gives us a rock to stand on in the sea of the world, and it teaches us to swim securely in the world’s waters.

In his last talk before he died, Thomas Merton said,

You can’t just immerse yourself in the world and get carried away with it. That is no salvation. If you want to pull a drowning man out of the water, you have to have some support yourself. Suppose somebody is drowning and you are standing on a rock – you can do it. Or suppose you can support yourself by swimming – you

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<sup>1</sup> These words are attributed to Thomas Merton: *Whoever we are, whatever may be our state of life, we are called to the glory and freedom of the sons of God. Our vocation is union with Christ. We are co-heirs with Him of His divine Sonship. Therefore, when you and I become what we are really meant to be, we will discover not only that we love one another perfectly, but that we are both living in Christ and Christ in us, and we are all One Christ. We will see that it is He who loves in us.*

can do it. There is nothing to be gained by simply jumping in the water and drowning with him (Merton 1971, 112).

I say that the “being” referred to is essentially a contemplative experience in which all categorizing and classifying activity, our verbal and symbolic thinking, has subsided. As a result, the person’s experience, among other things, becomes an ability to cope with all life’s experiences in ways that were earlier impossible for him or her. Life ceases to be a problem for the simple reason that it is no longer approached by intellectual effort alone. It is here that the power of the divine spirit works, in meditation. Clinebell writes, “No analysis of religious approaches to addiction can be complete if it leaves out the creative power of the divine Spirit...This power is equally available to all religions and nonreligious approaches to addiction” (Clinebell 1984, 180). Those who live an experiential spiritual life gain perspective and serenity. Personally, I feel the most peace and openness to God when I am in deep prayer and I reach this place of meditation in my own life through guided imagery. I continue to work on my own boundaries of allowing others to find their own way of spirituality and meditation with their Higher Power.

*We are living in the valley of the shadow of life*, wrote C. S. Lewis. We will be forever in the valley of the shadow until we discover how all things hold together in Christ. When we embark on that journey that searches for Christ we embark on a journey toward reality. It is a journey that can be made only in and by the power of the Spirit of God, whose will for us is to know Him, and who has called us into a quest for it. How beautifully St. Paul says it in his letter to the Philippian Christians:

I have suffered the loss of all things...in order that I may gain Christ...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection.

### Philippians 3:8-10

As we read through the scriptures, we come to realize that we are living in the valley of the shadow of life. We are on the verge of discovering the fullness of life in the Kingdom of God, and we live in the valley of the shadow until we find that kingdom and allow the full reign of God to be inaugurated within us. I believe that when God is fully inaugurated within the alcoholic, then recovery is more achievable. There is a spiritual or “enlightenment” model of recovery, which considers the alcoholic/addict as personally responsible to some extent for the emergence of the addiction (Hester and Miller 1989, 178). My experience of listening and observing shows me that as the alcoholic remains in meditation with the Higher Power or involved in an AA group, then recovery is maintained. However, when alienation, or disconnectedness, from the Higher Power or group happens then the person is more likely to relapse. In relapse, the alcoholic moves from the shadow of life to the valley of the shadow of death. Death is the disconnectedness in which an alcoholic no longer has wholeness in their life.

In the teachings of Jesus there is a recurrent theme of an absentee landlord. In the parable from Luke 12 we hear a warning that Christians must be faithful to their duty because they know neither the day nor the hour when the master will return. It is an apocalyptic picture which attempts to dramatize a fact about life, and that is that we stand under a tremendous responsibility to live faithfully to the very end. In the mind of the Gospel writer the end was synonymous with Jesus’ expected return.

There are certain anomalies in this parable that need to be considered. First, the parable teaches we are to be faithful in the absence of the Master, whereas in reality the Master is never really absent. Moreover, each of us (or, an alcoholic) lives on the edges

of either hell or heaven, on the edges of utter defeat or final victory. Indeed, both are possibilities for us at different times, especially where the little things of life are concerned. This is what the parable stresses – being faithful in the little things. The little things for the alcoholic are one day at a time, stay spiritually grounded, and stay involved in the AA group.

This is the glory and the peculiar torment of human life: A certain amount of living must be without the conscious experience of God's nearness. We are being encouraged in the parable to live during those intervals of emptiness as though God were visible. Often an alcoholic's life is filled with that age-old question of Hezekiah's, "why?" God is not visible to talk with, but through spirituality and meditation, one can find their place of meaningfulness in prayer with God. It is encouraging for us to live in a higher consciousness and to seek always and ever the Kingdom of God, even when the circumstances around us seem to give no evidence of that kingdom. I recall the poignant words said to have been written by a young Jew on the wall of the Warsaw ghetto:

- I believe in the sun, even if it does not shine.
- I believe in love, even if I do not feel it.
- I believe in God, even if I do not see Him.

This is what I mean when I say we live in the valley of the shadow of life. The Kingdom of God is an ever-present reality, but that reality is sometimes obscured and temporarily hidden by the passing circumstances of life. God is in control and bringing ultimate good from every misshapen form or pattern that we in our human ignorance create.

From a book entitled *Rule For A New Brother*, comes some practical advice for any who aspire to a higher spiritual discipline in daily life:

Your life unfolds in a continuous succession of experiences and expectations. No two days are the same, no year leaves you unaltered. Every day has enough troubles of its own. When you go to sleep, bury all that has happened in the mercy of God. It will be safe there. Stand back for all that has happened and be grateful for it all.

When the day begins, be sure that you yourself can be as new and as pure as the new light. It is like a resurrection. The first hour is the most important of the day. Don't yield to laziness, but greet the day with joy for the new opportunities God offers you.

Even in the complicated world of today try to keep close to a natural rhythm of life. See all encounters with others as high peaks in your life, as upbuilding. The more you give, the more you will receive.

Your way through life will not remain the same. There are years of happiness and years of suffering. There are years of abundance and years of poverty, years of hope and years of disappointment, years of building up and years of breaking down.

But God has a firm hold on you through everything.... the years of strength and the years of weakness. The years of certainty and years of doubt are all a necessary part of life. It is worth the effort if you live it up to the end and do not give up before it is accomplished (Van Der Looy 1976, 54).

As complex as life may be at times, and despite its alternating rhythms of joy and despair, this simple fact remains: God has a firm hold on us through everything. Sometimes we make the religious experience a difficult one by our pedantic doctrines and theological discursive. But the one consistent theme in the Bible is a simple one indeed: God takes care of us and is always with us.

If we can grasp this simple fact and hold to it, then every single moment of life is invested with tremendous significance. Knowing that God holds everything helps us

approach life in a different manner than if we feel we are alone in some part of life without God. Nothing can happen to us that can destroy us or do permanent damage. There is a part of us that can never be violated, if we are holding to the realization that we belong to God. We do not have to try to make anything happen except to open our consciousness to more of God. For those who do believe in God this is difficult to comprehend. Therefore, it is the believer's opportunity to share their belief that can be concretely understood by their own actions of love, care, and faith walk.

From my own meditative patterns has emerged a threefold dimension of life that has been helpful to me and has given me a basic serenity and calmness of spirit that seems to remain. It is this:

- There is rhythm in the pattern of life if we want to find it
- There is wholeness and connectedness in the totality of life if we will look at more than the fragments.
- There is courage and confidence given to help us walk through the dark times of life.

#### The Rhythm in the Pattern of Life

Even though there are years of abundance and years of need, years of strength and years of weakness, we discover that there is a meaning and purpose to the pattern of life, and that an essential rhythm beats through all of it that is good. God is always willing our highest and our best. Nothing that happens is ever wasted; nothing is beyond the control of God.

As I watch my daughters Kayleigh, Alexandra and Piper do latch hook for their home school craft time, it is evident that there is a 'right' side and a "wrong" side. The

wrong side is necessary, for it makes possible what we call the good side. Sometimes life looks muddled and tangled to us because we are temporarily viewing it from the wrong side. In actuality it is not a wrong side at all. It is what makes possible the higher dimension. God sees the fabric of the pattern we are weaving with a knowing that is not limited to one side alone. He knows that the muddles and tangled snarls we have created have indeed the possibility of producing a beautiful and perfect pattern, if we give it to Him.

In the spiritual life, we must be prepared to receive illumination from unexpected quarters, to learn our lessons in completely unfamiliar terms. It may mean straining our ears to catch the overtones of God in a situation where God seems to be absent. It may mean abandoning some of our most cherished perceptions and notions in order to bare ourselves to truths that we have not before been prepared to face. I feel that this is something of what St. Paul meant when he said our lives are hid in Christ (Col 3:3). The strongest power in the universe, which was in Jesus, is also here for us and is seeing us through even our most hopeless situations.

When dark days or dark years come, as they inevitably will, we can take heart in the fact that the pattern of life has a rhythm, and that the higher part of our nature is being awakened by that rhythm.

### The Wholeness and Connectedness in Life

Life is much larger than we have ever imagined it to be. It is by no means confined to the experiences that we have while on this earth in these earthly bodies. This need not confuse us. Often the reason we are confused is because we see nothing but our



own little path in the mists of a dark unknown. One of the Navy Chaplain clichés is to “think out of the box.” This is so true when it comes to my expectations of God.

There is a larger vision waiting for us. God wants us to see our own history in concert with the divine plan for the universe and to learn to appreciate the beauty and order by which our lives have been planned. It is like toiling and laboring for years under the conductor of an orchestra, never really permitted to hear anything but our own little part. Then one day we are invited to become a hearer, and we find ourselves surprised and delighted as the total symphony is presented to our ears. It was essential for us to spend time in the orchestra, but at a later point in our development it also becomes important for us to step off the stage (loss of ego) and hear the entire concert. This is looking in the face of the universe instead of at its side or its back.

#### The Courage and Confidence to Help us Walk

Often when we talk about spiritual or religious experience, we share only the moments of great insight, the great victories, or supernatural visions. But the common religious experience is not this way. It is more generally a day-by-day plodding with tiny glimmers or sparks of light illuminating our way rather than the blazing glory of a brilliance that transforms all existence. Narrative Theory, which I will discuss in the next chapter, calls these “sparkling moments.” The important thing is for us to know that God is always giving us courage to go through the darkness, if we will open ourselves to receive it.

Living in the valley of the shadow of life, as we all do, we will encounter conflicts, losses, and moments of despair, but we do not need to give up and we do not reject our opportunities. This is vitally important. We must train ourselves to believe in

absolute faith that hope is greater than despair, that joy is stronger than sorrow, that peace is more enduring than conflict, and that courage is more powerful than fear. We grow into this outlook as our faith in God matures. We are called to attend religious services, study scripture, and share our joy with others. Our absolute faith becomes apparent to others as we share God's love, mercy, healing and grace.

Gerald May has been influential in my thinking and his understanding of grace is especially important.

Dr. May describes grace in a way that, "we are God's children, so simply loved. Ideally, an infant does not earn her parents' love; they love the baby first. God 'graces' us in similar ways" (May 1988, 120). When I counsel with alcoholics at their bedsides, I want to bring out in them their experience of God's grace. The way I do this is by asking them, "Can you tell me of a time when God's grace was real in your life?" One man who fell into relapse said, "Oh sure, about 100 times." I listened and was deeply moved as I journeyed through this man's story with him. I was truly blessed by listening to how God had been active and real in his life. When I left, the man had tears in his eyes because even though he was "walking in the dark" he knew that the grace of God had been with him, was currently with him, and would be in his future. He could see that glimmer of light that graces the valley of the shadow of life.

In the lives of two elderly women forced to complete their lives in a convalescent home for the aged is a remarkable demonstration of what I have shared in these few pages. One woman fought the experience of being there; she rejected her circumstances so forcefully that she soon became disoriented.

The other woman, her roommate, recognized that her true freedom came from within rather than from outer circumstances. She set about to make her life useful and interesting, even in a rest home. She kept a few of her most treasured books, her radio, and a few mementos from the past. She made every effort to be alert and helpful to others. She took seriously the fact that in her retirement she now had the time and opportunity for a prayer ministry that she had never had before. Her prayer life deepened in its content and was far-reaching in its scope.

The latter woman kept a journal, and when she died, her family requested that appropriate thoughts from her diary be shared at her memorial service. Here are just a few thoughts she wrote in those final years of confinement:

It has come to me this evening as I watch the day fade into gentle twilight from my window where now I must spend my time, that there is one thing in this world that is every bit as certain as night, and that is death.

Death, no matter how you talk about it, is the awful abyss that removes our dear ones from us with a finality that is absolute. I do not know if there is an awakening on the other side. Perhaps there is, just as there is always day on the other side of night. I am sure I would be much comforted in my final years if I knew there was.

But this I do know. We don't have to die to go to heaven. Heaven is within us. It's not something we die for; it's something we take with us. And it's within everything. There is a Christ within all of life – every person, every bird, and every tree – a quality of life that is sacred.

It seems to me, therefore, that the worst thing we might do is not to commit some error in faith by believing the wrong thing or not believing the right thing. The worst thing we could do is to mistreat someone else, for when we do, we are mistreating Christ.

My voice is not heard very far these days, but if I could say anything to the world, it would simply be this: Be gentle with one another. The time is short, and life is precious. Be gentle.

Here is the essence of her life within the limits of a few short paragraphs in her journal, her spiritual journey: Treat each other with respect and compassion, not with violence or anger, but with love. She discovered through a life of prayer and meditation that there was rhythm to life, a movement from good to bad, from bad to good. She discovered also that through the eyes of God, the eyes of love, that hope is greater than despair, that joy is stronger than sorrow, that peace is more enduring than conflicts, and that courage is more powerful than fear.

This story relates to the pastoral care of alcoholics because of her personal understanding of what connection, meaning and wholeness meant to her. This is a state of being that, if alcoholics can achieve, they can find their own meaning. She developed serenity in her later years that helped her see life not as a problem to be solved, but as an experience to be enjoyed in its fullness. She discovered a way to be in the world, to see if every person, every bird, and every tree, a quality of life that was sacred. Her life was joined with God. The abundant life, which Jesus came both to demonstrate and to give to us, was hers. She moved beyond the shadow into the Kingdom, into the fullness of God.

Henry Drummond's booklet, *The Greatest Thing in the World*, sold millions of copies since it was written at the beginning of this century. His words are still fresh and challenging today:

You will find as you look back upon your life that the moments that stand out, the moments when you have really lived, are the moments when you have done things in a spirit of love. The final test of religion is not religiousness, but love; not what I have done, not what I have believed. Not what I have achieved, but how I have discharged the common charities of life.

As I continue my counseling and visitation with alcoholics and their families at The New England Baptist Hospital and The Boston Christian Counseling Center, I look forward to my own learning as I journey through our lives together. I enjoy being able to share my own spiritual life of prayer and meditation with people who may be in a time of special need in their lives.

Before I end this chapter I want to talk about the actual practice of a specific prayer and the vitality it adds to people's lives. Through sharing my own prayer and meditation, I empower people, to whom I minister, to strengthen their own practices. The following familiar quote shares my deep desire to share the joy and peace I receive through my prayer life, "If you give a person a fish, you feed that person for a day but, if you teach the person how to fish, you have fed that person for a lifetime." This is an example of why I share centering prayer with patients in the hospital bed. The Centering Prayer style is from Fr. Basil Pennington.

I share with the alcoholic (this is for anyone) that centering prayer is a simple way of prayer, which can be used by anyone who wants to be with God, to experience His love and presence. Centering prayer is a prayer of longing that leads into a prayer of presence. First, I settle down with the person. I say, "most of us pray best sitting down but take any posture that works well for you." If we gently close our eyes, we immediately begin to quiet down; we use a lot of energy in our sense of sight. Once we are settled down, we turn our attention to the Lord present with us. We know He is there by faith, that is, we know He is there because He said so. In love, we turn ourselves over to Him. For these twenty minutes, we are all His.

In order to be able to be quiet and attentive to God, we use a word, a prayer word – a simple word that expresses our being to the Lord in love. It might well be our favorite name for Him: Love, Jesus, Father, Parent...any word that is right for the alcoholic. We just let that word be there, to keep us attentive to Him. It is not an effortful word or a constantly repeated mantra, but rather a focusing word. Whenever, during the time of prayer, we become aware of anything else, we simply use our word to return to the Lord. During these twenty minutes, we don't seek anything for ourselves. All our attention is on Him. It is outside the time of prayer that we will begin to see the difference, as the fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, kindness...begin to flourish in our lives. With the fruits of the Spirit, comes meaning and connection.

At the end of twenty minutes I tell the alcoholic I am sharing prayer with that we do not want to jump right back into activity. We want to end our prayer very gently. I suggest praying interiorly, very slowly, the Lord's Prayer. The deep peace of our contemplative prayer will flow into our active lives. I share this centering prayer with anyone who wants to join me.

I was surprised some months ago when a career Marine Corps Officer came to see me because he needed to talk with someone. He said he chose me because I seemed pretty relaxed and unworried. He said I seemed to have a serenity he had not always seen in others. His marriage was coming apart, he felt he was performing poorly on the job, and he was caught in the stranglehold of alcohol addiction. "I would give anything to be as calm and collected as you", he told me.

My reply, in essence, was "If you mean that, you can surely have it because it is available for everyone". I shared with him my own journey in the Spirit. He confessed

that he had once believed, but had put it aside for many years. We prayed together, and before he left I outlined for him several steps he needed to take: See a marriage counselor with his wife, ask for treatment for his alcoholism, and participate in a church fellowship where he felt his life was nurtured and strengthened.

His life changed. His marriage was repaired; he got control of his drinking problem and his job satisfaction and performance improved. We saw each other briefly just before I moved from San Diego to Boston and he thanked me for giving him the key.

“You had the key,” I told him. “I just helped you remember where it was.”

### CHAPTER 3

## THE RESOURCE OF NARRATIVE THEORY

*Do not remember the former things,  
or consider the things of old.  
I am about to do a new thing:  
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"*

*--Isaiah 43:19*

Alcoholics, in their condition of meaninglessness do not know that God refuses to abandon them. If their body, mind and spirit are to recover, they must take the remarkable chance of throwing themselves into God's arms and finding out experientially that God's love is strong enough to hold them. Narrative theory is a spiritual resource, which enables the alcoholic and me to journey and create a new story for our lives and recovery.

The following detailed assumptions of narrative, the assumptions about people which narrative theory holds, the goals of narrative, the role of the narrative therapist, and the techniques of narrative therapy come from Freedman and Combs in their book, *Narrative Therapy*. Another valuable resource was a lecture handout from Dr. Mark C. Bromley, Ph.D., LMFT who spoke to my Boston Christian Counseling Center internship group on April 1, 2002 and April 29, 2002. I list these specific descriptions, so just as a reader comes to this section of my writing for the first time and may not be familiar with narrative theory, he or she receives not only information but a first hand experience of the



“not knowing” stance. Through my description of each of these elements throughout the chapter, I show why narrative is a fantastic spiritual resource. Narrative therapy is characterized by the following assumptions, ideas, and beliefs: The central assumption is that a person’s experience is fundamentally ambiguous in that each person organizes the elements of his or her human experience. The pieces of the experience are combined, given meaning and prioritized as to their importance and meaning. The meaning of a person’s experience is not apparent to other people and may suggest a multitude of understandings and interpretations.

Narrative therapy’s basic assumptions about people are: People have good intentions and are not in need of problems as in the functionalism view where a problem has a function and serves a purpose for the individual or system. People are influenced by the dominant messages of their surroundings and value systems. People (the self and its behaviors) are not their problems. People can develop new stories or narratives that empower new behavior and thinking once they are separated from the cultural messages they have been influenced by.

The theoretical goal of treatment in narrative therapy is to help people co-author and rewrite the stories of their lives, re-visioning their pasts and rewriting their futures. The new narratives should ideally emphasize their preferred ways of relating to themselves and others, including the larger culture. This frees clients from oppressive cultural assumptions about how they should be and empowers them to be active agents in their lives. The “bottom line” goal is the liberation of the client from old narratives.

The role of the therapist in narrative therapy is to help the client explore his or her history, including family history, to find “unique outcomes.” These are times when the

client resisted the problem or behaved in ways that contradict the dominant story of their life. Also, to challenge dominant narratives in people's lives by identifying the cultural sources; this necessitates that the therapist avoid colluding with the dominant discourse and the therapist assume responsibility for his or her attitudes and actions that may perpetuate cultural injustices and affect the client. Narrative therapy encourages therapists to be collaborative with and interested in the client's story. The therapist is to search for the client's resources and times when he or she was strong in relationship to the problem and use questions more than directives. The therapist should not label clients but should consider each as unique and help people separate from destructive dominant narratives and open opportunities for creating new life stories.

The techniques of the narrative therapy approach include: Externalizing the problem, asking about and listening for unique outcomes, reauthoring or reconstructing a new story, the not knowing stance, and the landscape of action. Externalizing the problem is directing the therapeutic discussion of the problem to locate the problem outside or external to the person rather than reinforcing the view that the problem *is* the person or is located in the client. This is used to shift the client's perception of self. This is accomplished by the therapist asking about the effect or influence of the problem on the client or family. Asking about and listening for unique outcomes detects when clients resisted the problem's influence on his or her life. This also helps people see times of effectiveness and a means in which to weave a new story together using this newly uncovered material. Reauthoring or reconstructing a new story is the creation of a new narrative or story that will assist the client in a revision of his or her whole identity and problem-saturated story. The stance of not knowing creates the process which "we are

always moving toward what is not yet known.” This implies not asking questions from a position of pre-understanding and not asking questions to which we want particular answers. The landscape of action moves the therapist and the client through plotting the sequences of the events through time. The characteristics of the landscape of action include: Agent, intention or goal, situation, and instrument. This is similar to the journalism ideals of : who, what, when, where, and how.

Jesus experienced the sense of being deserted by God but also had the experience of trusting God even in death. The recovering alcoholic may, in union with Christ, trust God for resurrection from the land of the dead. Both Christ and the alcoholic experience resurrection from death as a gracious gift from God who is the Power of all powers. Memories, which we read about in Chapter one, are in a sense “our story” which we repeat to ourselves to confront the present and to prepare us to meet the future. Narrative therapy, as a wholistic spiritual therapy, must not then treat simply the isolated memory, painful or otherwise, but also see those memories in relation to the whole direction of a person’s life goal in it’s meaning and value.

I use the narrative therapy approach with alcoholics to show how important the healing of spiritual care is to the body, mind, and spirit. Narrative therapy enhances pastoral care because it allows me as the therapist to journey through the alcoholic’s problem with them and ultimately brings spiritual meaningfulness back into the person’s life.

Alice Morgan introduces her book with these two principles and invites the reader to journey through her book with the following ideas in mind: Always maintain a stance of curiosity, and always ask questions to which you genuinely do not know the answers (Morgan 2000, 2). These two basics are the cornerstones by which I plan to continue my

study of this post-modern ministry resource. Although I plan on building my understanding of narrative with these easy to follow principles, I know through personal experience the implementation of this theory with a client is intensive and personally exhaustive. There is an immense ethical responsibility that comes with this practice because it is new to me and I must maintain my boundaries as a therapist. I must remember my limitations as I journey with another person through their story.

One of the primary benefits of narrative is that the theory and practice empowers the client. The issue becomes not how someone has to work with the internal problem but how to view the problem as an outsider wanting to see the landscape of action. The externalization of the problem is a refreshing change of direction and empowers the client. This is also very difficult for me to get a handle on because it is a switch from the way I have been counseling for many years.

A concrete way narrative therapy works on externalizing the problem is by making a perceptual shift in the way questions are asked. Instead of asking a question with the adjective form of a word for example, “what are you most angry about?” the therapist would make the shift to the noun form of the word, “what effect does the anger have on your life and relationships?” (Freedman and Combs 1996, 50). When the therapist is able to have the client picture the problem as an object, which is external, then the client is free to deconstruct her story.

This externalization is vital to narrative therapy because it guides the therapy session down many paths. One of those paths is that it makes the client the expert on her own story. If the problem is not externalized then she is constantly focusing on the rules and patterns of a modernistic family therapy approach. Also, pathologizing and/or labeling of

her story could create the outcome that the problem is her's (the alcoholic as a person) instead of an externalized problem. Narrative therapy moves beyond this thinking and empowers the client to be the expert and even stand up for herself to her problem. She is able to speak to the problem and tell the problem what she thinks. This makes her the expert in her own life and the problems appear less fixed and less restrictive (Morgan 2000, 24). Michael White also explains that externalizing problems enables persons to separate themselves and their relationships from such problems. These practices do not separate persons from responsibility for the extent to which they participate in the survival of the problem. This allows the client to be able to describe the relationship with the problem, which in turn can give them some responsibility for the problem (White and Epston 1990, 65).

I will illustrate these practices by presenting an interview I held with a friend of mine, named Ralph. Ralph was a college roommate of mine. He is one of the few college friends that I continue to keep in touch with. Ralph is a recovering alcoholic and regularly attends Alcoholics Anonymous. I chose Ralph to interview for this thesis because I know he has a good idea of the meaningfulness, which can return to an alcoholic's life once connection with their Higher Power and subsequently, family, is made. I will show the spiritual resource of narrative theory by asking questions, which will require Ralph to think of his problem and story in a new light and framework. My intentions will be to deconstruct the problem of alcoholism in Ralph's life to make it something that he has control over.

One particular merit of the narrative theory is the use of letters and counter documents. These instruments serve a number of purposes. One of the crucial purposes

they serve while working with an alcoholic is that they maintain connectedness for the client and therapist between counseling sessions. They allow the therapist to correspond with the client in between sessions and get the client thinking about what happened previously in their session together. The documents allow the therapist to reflect on the previous session as well as prepare for the next session. I find that in my counseling all too often clients return from the week and he or she has barely thought about our previous session. Sometimes the external problem is not bothersome so a great deal of thought was not necessary during the week, but this leads to the problem of a week going by without progressive growth. I want to provide my clients with the best therapy I can so I would always hope there is personal growth for both of us during the week.

While reviewing notes, the therapist can create some thought provoking questions for the client to think about during the week. Letters help to thicken the story and make the client maintain her attentiveness to the issues at hand. One key aspect about letters, which Freedman and Combs mentions is that, “letters involve us more thoroughly in the co-authoring process, giving us an opportunity to think about the questions we use” (Freedman and Combs 1996, 208). This is an important aspect of narrative therapy for me to remember. In my prior counseling experience with family therapy, I was determined to gather facts during my sessions. Even during the week, I reflected on how I would continue to gather more facts during the next session. With these facts I would be able to make a grand generalization on the client’s problem and hopefully provide a fix. With the narrative approach, letters are used to reflect the indigenous knowledge of the client and allow her to search for meaning to the externalized problem. This is a total paradigm shift from my prior experience.

For pastoral care providers, narrative therapy opens the client's space up to hope in God. Narrative therapy as a narrative theory, does not have a theology – although, it does have theological implications and resonances. The reality of a narrative therapist's ministry in working with alcoholics is that people are coming to therapy because there is a difficulty in their lives, a lack of meaning and connection. Not being the expert allows the therapist to be more attentive to indigenous knowledge and affirms the person's pain, hurt and suffering. Ralph, whom I chose to interview for this thesis, is struggling with a "developmental stage reality" brought on by his "long-term situation" of alcoholism. This example shows that Ralph is indeed struggling with a sense of hopelessness, yet through telling the story, the reality of hope in God or Higher Power can be healing. Hopelessness in an alcoholic's narrative is vital to overcome. When a new narrative is created, hopelessness can turn into hopefulness. Lester speaks more about the characteristics, which can bring about hopelessness.

In Lester's book he states that hopelessness approaches the future from one of four perspectives: (1) dread, (2) anxiety, (3) suspicion, and (4) apathy (Lester 1995, 89). No matter which perspective a client is telling her story from, the therapist shares that God's grace is already here among us. Narrative theology opens up our thinking and space so we look at providence in our everyday lives instead of hopelessness. The scriptures in II Corinthians 5:17, say, "behold, new things have come." This is an invitation to accept the fact that there is hope in God. When a client expresses hopelessness, her dominant story is full of rigidity and inflexibility. As ministers of reconciliation (II Corinthians 5:18), we provide possibilities, liberation, and hope through narrative therapy.

Again, I chose a friend of mine whose name will be Ralph to tell me his story of his alcohol addiction. His alcoholism has caused great turmoil in his family. He is married with three boys ages 5, 8, and 11. He has lived separately from his spouse for two years although they are not legally separated. They have recently started up communication together because he is very active in Alcoholics Anonymous. Ralph has reached the step, which calls for “amends” with loved ones, and last month he met with his wife and this step was successful. He was President of a family run construction company and has a stable income. I am confident that he will return one day as President of the construction company.

He continues to struggle with the problem alcohol created in his life with his family. He feels he has to reach a certain amount of success with AA before he can return to his family. Ralph has a daily concern that he will relapse into alcoholism.

Excerpt from the session:

L: Tell me about something that is problematic in your life:

R: I have had trouble with alcohol in the past and it has caused me a lot of problems. I have troubles with personal relationships. I couldn't control my emotional nature. I had fear, sadness, depression, financial insecurity, an angry wife and parents.

L: I invite you to make a selection about what you would like to focus on during our time together.



R: Alcohol is used to cover up your fears so you don't deal with your fears. You don't grow through your fears.

L: Can you tell me a time when you realized through your fear that alcohol was a problem in your life?

R: Well kind of like socially it gives you confidence to go up and meet people. Even very attractive women I normally wouldn't go up to and say a word to, but now I can have a drink and go up and meet them. When alcohol stops working then the fear comes right back and you don't want to face the trouble you created. Fears also are alive in the stupid things you have done while drinking.

L: When you say the stupid things you have done, can you tell me more?

R: Yes, like being neglectful of the wife and kids and not being around enough. I even stopped working because I was upset at my dad. I was always moving around and selling my houses to move to different locations.

L: When you say neglecting your wife and selling your houses that is not an overnight event. Are you talking about stupid things over the years as opposed to just over night?

R: The stupid things are like being gone from my boys. If I wasn't an alcoholic I wouldn't have done all of those things and I would still have a family. They (AA) tell us that the more we drink on a daily basis the more it numbs our feelings and understandings. My uncle and aunts are all alcoholics. My uncle Dieter, from Germany died because he drank so much. My other Aunt Angela's liver almost shut down and she

went to AA. Most of my German family is alcoholic; in my German side the genetics of alcoholism run hard.

L: I would like to hear more about how alcohol is problematic for your family.

R: I don't know if it is generational. There is a big tendency that it could be. They are saying that there is a mathematical probability that there is. There is a genome project, which is going on now that could tell. They are counting genes and all that stuff. No matter how it affects me, I was drinking on a daily basis.

L: Yes but perhaps you can think how it affects you, Ralph, on a daily basis?

R: I think it is genetic, but I also think you can alter your own body. Those are the two things that I think affect me. I think you can push your body long and hard enough to get your body to change. These are the two things that AA agrees with and I have both items in my life: First, there are genes which predispose you where you cross the line and you over do it, and second, you make yourself an alcoholic. I have drunk more than most people have spilled on the ground. Once you cross the line, you can't go back. Like the Big Book says about people who had their legs amputated, you don't have them any more. Now that I am an alcoholic I can't even have a drink or I won't stop. I have a phenomenal tolerance. A tolerance that you wouldn't believe. My body gets toxic. If I was to ever start, I just couldn't stop. There are two types of alcoholics: First, continuous, like me the daily drinker and secondly, the binge drinkers. I guess there are the black out drinkers also. They just drink and party on the weekends and never stop.

L: Since you are the expert on this genetic and personal altering of your body, tell me how alcohol gets the best of you.

R: It says. This is what it (alcohol) says. Ralph, I can take fear away from you. I can take anger away from you. I can take restlessness away from you. I can make you feel great. Remember all of the fun you had drinking with all your friends on the boat or skiing? Wherever you had fun, I was there. That's what it tells me.

What it doesn't tell me is, "If you pick this up you are going to end up in the hospital in the treatment center. It doesn't say drink me and you will end up in the hospital in the Betty Ford Center. It doesn't say you will be throwing up in the toilet and have the shakes and you will be sitting in front of the toilet. It doesn't do any of that. I remember the first time I fell off my bike on my face and all the intensity of it. It was terrible. We don't remember the pain and humiliation of our drinking. As time goes on we don't remember the pain, what we remember is our fun times. For example I sure remember sitting in front of a water ski lodge in my boat. I don't remember the hang over I had the next day. I don't remember the painful times.

Alcohol doesn't let us remember the pain. Alcohol doesn't want us to be traumatized the rest of our life because then we wouldn't want to be with it. If a person remembered every time he fell while drinking he wouldn't drink anymore, so alcohol doesn't want me to remember. As an Alcoholic, I can't stop. I have a physical allergy. In AA we call it a phenomena of craving.<sup>1</sup> If I have one or two, it's like I can't stop there.

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<sup>1</sup> Through knowing Ralph for many years, I am very aware that he has been taking Zantac for ulcers. This is certainly his body speaking to him about the trauma and turmoil in his life. The Griffith's book *The Body Speaks* is certainly noteworthy here.

L: It saddens me to hear that the problem is a phenomenon of craving and a physical allergy for you. I think of an allergy as something that doesn't go away for your entire life. I remember my sister's story of her allergies. She had pins stuck in her back to find out what her specific allergies were. Going to AA I wonder if it is like having pins stuck in your back in the fact that you have to do it to get better, and you know it will work. I hear you really know what alcohol says to you. This tells me that you are in touch with your feelings and emotions. As we talk more and more about alcohol, tell me how you see it as a problem. I want to hear how it is the problem, not you.

As we continue to build your story of how you see alcohol's effect on you, let's talk about your ability to resist the temptations of alcohol. Since going to AA how have you built your resistance to alcohol?

R: If I could have stopped drinking, I would have stopped drinking. It's not about willpower. I know what willpower is. I worked 16 hours a day at law school and I work hard. This is so true. I was the President of our real estate company. I ran the operations of over two hundred people. This is all about God; it is not about will power. My alcohol problem is way bigger than me. The absolute, brightest people I have ever met are in AA. I know in the future I will be back with my wife and children. It is not a will power thing, Lee, it is a surrendering to God. It's in the Bible. You have to surrender and give up to God. You have to stop trying to not want it. It is more difficult than that. It's like you have to give it to God before anything can change in your life. It's not about willpower.

L: I hear that you are really looking forward to the future and tackling the problem with God's help. It's greater than willpower. It's something you are not able to control in your own life. I wonder what alcohol does to you and how it affects the meaning in your life?

R: I do have a better understanding of the meaning in my life since I have given up alcohol. That is true and the Higher Power of the AA program and going back to Catholic Mass has also helped with this sense of meaning. However, this problem is greater than your own personal instincts, and you are born with instincts. You know Priests pray about this that God will take it away. You might know more about this than me because you are a minister.

L: We have talked about God, surrendering, intellectualism, and prayer. Tell me more simply how you resist alcohol with God's help. How does God help you with putting meaning back in your life?

R: Take the 12-step program. It is a spiritual journey through this problem of alcohol. It always comes down to giving the credit to God. I hear what you are saying and asking, that you want me to take credit for something that I do. I am treating you like you are a sponsoree, someone I sponsor. I need them to work through their own journey. But you want to know what I do. Ask the question again.

L: How do you put meaning or connection back in your life with God's help?

R: I pray upon awakening. Do I need to get into the details? I read some daily meditations, which I put in front of the coffee cup every night before I go to bed so I see

them first thing in the morning. This way I know I am going to do it. I go to a meeting, which is every morning. Do you want me to describe the meetings?

L: I would like to hear about how going to meetings allows you to have a sense of direction and meaning and how the meetings help resist alcohol in your daily life?

(checking in) Ralph, how are you feeling about me writing this down as you go?

R: It is helping me more than you would ever know.

L: I am asking you so I can hear your story and I am listening so we can move through your stated problem of alcohol together. I want to learn what you, the expert, have to say about alcohol.

R: The meeting is not about drinking. When I got into AA I thought it was going to be about one thing but now that I am in it, it isn't even in the same galaxy that I thought it was. The meeting is about finding a life that is even better than a normal person's life.<sup>2</sup> It is based on the basics of Christianity where people cannot help themselves except by helping others. When I go to the meetings I am able to resist alcohol because of God. In the meetings we pray at the beginning and the ending, sometimes in the middle also. For sure we pray at the end.

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<sup>2</sup> In my chapter on prayer and meditation, I talk about Kus's book *Spirituality and Chemical Dependency*, (page 36) where he writes about a Pastor saying, "I'm glad I'm an alcoholic. He went on to explain that he learned how much God loved him and how much he loved God. A.A. spirituality has done more for him and for many clergymen than religion had. He is indeed 'weller than well.' " This is an example which strengthens Ralph's statement for me when he says AA has helped him have a life better than a normal person's life.

L: What does the prayer do for you, which allows you to resist alcohol? Let me know if any of these questions are not appropriate or if you just would rather pass on the answer.

R: Thanks for saying that. The prayer allows me to realize the presence of God. Gives me God consciousness. Whenever I have a God consciousness, I don't need anything. It's like it's own buzz almost. I can totally understand the spirituality thing. I understand the Higher Power thing and all. When I was 14, I was an altar boy and understood all of that stuff. These old timers in the program, they pray and meditate all the time.

L: I believe that is a blessing about the way you can come into the presence of God. Prayer and meditation sound vital to your new story of life.

R: I don't have any obsession, desire, or cravings or anything like that. I have been lifted by God. He comes and takes it away.

L: Are there other times when you were able to resist alcohol? Let me rephrase this question. Tell me of another time with God's help that you were able to resist alcohol?

R: We talk about experience, strength and hope at the meetings. The Big Book is the message of the 12 steps. There are more than two hundred and thirty different programs that came from that book for example: Over Eaters Anonymous, and Sex Anonymous. They are regular 12 step programs and they started from the Big Book. The kicker to this Big Book is that just about every line for line you can find in the Bible. The members of AA talk throughout the meeting about God. Some people do not like to talk about God. People know it's not a religious program so they don't want to talk about God. It is Christian based. People need help, we don't want them dying out there in the streets.

The old timers all talk about God. Eventually you get God or you don't ever get what you need to be sober. Some people have oak trees, or the wind in the mountains; they can do that as a Higher Power, which is a power greater than them. Now I am not judging them because that is not what I am to do. But people have to get to God. I have people who are sponsees, those are people I am sponsoring who I am taking through the steps.

I wanted to clarify that aspect about God's perception by people in the AA program. As to the question you asked me when I put off alcohol, I do it now on a daily basis. There were days when I would drink all day long. Now I know I can't drink because I won't stop. I have to make a conscious effort not to drink, and I do it all the time. It's a decision I stick to, and I get the help by going to AA.

L: When you say the word God as opposed to Higher Power, and you mentioned some people look to their Higher Power in the oak trees or wind, but they eventually have to know God, tell me what you mean when you say God?

R: I know this guy whose Higher Power is an oak tree. When I look at him he has "Christ eyes." His oak tree was in a prison yard. When I see him he gives me a big hug and I know he is full of God.

This is my observation. The old timers refer to God in the way we understand God, not like in the oak tree. My observation is that there are people who are in search of God, and eventually do find God. God to me is what I grew up with in the Catholic Church, God the Father.



L: Are you talking about God as the way you connected with God in the context of when you were 14 years old and an altar boy?

R: Yes, this is a big deal. When I was younger I was a good kid. My perception of God as a kid was that God was loving and kind and I had a conscious contact with him. Then a point came when I was out there running the streets, especially in high school. I was a rabble-rouser. I caused trouble for the sport of it, just for sport, being mean. Then I thought God was a punishing kind of a God. God was getting revenge on me and I lost my excitement over my relationship with Him. He was not that loving and kind. I hung onto those feelings for so long, and I was hiding from Him because of the guilt and shame I was feeling. Shame is the fear of being found out. ---Long silence---

L: That's a lot to carry, shame and guilt.

R: Let me clarify that God thing a minute because it is part of that. I don't want to leave God hanging like that. The reason I felt that way about God was because I was like that. We can only relate to God by the things we have going on in our own life. If he is punishing, we are punishing. If he is loving, we are loving. Then I got into the AA program. All of this stuff is to degrees, the words I am using. This is not total extremes I am talking about here. When I say that God is miserable I am sure it was because I was miserable.

Step two in the AA program says, "came to believe that a power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity." Higher Power sounds like too much semantics for God. I like the whole idea that a power greater than yourself can restore you to sanity. You believe in the trinity. Tell me what you think about God.

L: I believe in the trinity as God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. I would not use the term Higher Power for God because I would only relate to God as God. I wouldn't relate to a higher power as something in an oak tree or in the wind. I believe God became incarnate in Christ. Thomas stuck his finger through Christ's hand when he was crucified. This is my understanding of God; does it resonate with you and your understanding?

R: I like to use the wording "power greater than me." I don't like the use of Higher Power. The Mormons are interesting people. Whenever you try and self empower yourself you start dying. Whenever you humble yourself and turn your will and your life over to God you are alive. That is step 3 in AA. There are no religions that disapprove of the 12 steps because we don't conflict with anybody. We don't approve or disapprove of anyone; we just want to help all on the road to recovery. Our main purpose is to help the alcoholic who is suffering.

The first guy I sponsored was sober for about 5 months and then I never saw him again. He went through about \$35,000 in one month on drugs. The second sponsoree I have is celebrating his 14<sup>th</sup> month today, he is doing great. The first guy is back and we are talking. Like I said earlier, either you get God or you go back out into the world. That is what it is. The question is do you want God bad enough?

L: How do you experience God in a meeting?

R: We explain the steps. The way you get God is to go through the steps of getting God in your life. We pray with them all the time and show each other acts of kindness and love. Nobody says, "Get God." Nobody says, "You have to do it." If someone wants to

stop, this is what he or she has to do. If you want to go back out into the drinking world, then go ahead and when you are ready to come back, we will be here. The old timers in the program tell people, "If you are not ready to come here then go back out. Hopefully, you will make it back." We don't force people to go through the AA program.

L: When I think about that beautiful, but firm story, I remember the beautiful story about how Christ loves us. The passage in the Bible says, "Christ stands at the door and knocks. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come into him and sup with him and he with me." Also, "What you do to the least you do to me." Is this something like the experience you have at AA?

L: Let me check in for a moment here, we have been doing a lot of talking together. How are you doing? O.K? Do you need to get a drink of water or anything?

Break for 10 minutes.

L: What do you say to alcohol now?

R: I don't fight alcohol or resist it. Alcohol doesn't bother me. If people want to drink that's their prerogative. I have had my share of chemical peace of mind. That's one of the promises when you start doing the steps. The promise is that you stop fighting anything or anyone including people, place, or things. Including alcohol. They say you are in a place of neutrality; you are neither fighting nor resisting nor tempted. Alcohol is nothing to me anymore.

L: If you were to talk with alcohol right now, what might you say?

R: I .....I don't know.

L: Alcohol is an external problem and you are looking at it. Say something to it.

R: (To alcohol:) You look repulsive. I don't like rotten potatoes. Vodka is made out of rotten potatoes. Life is too good.

L: Life is too good.

R: (To alcohol:) I am so glad you taught me about the 12-step program and you brought me close to God. You have really put my life off. I am angry with you. When I get back with my wife I will love her more than ever before. Alcohol, you have given me a whole new outlook on life and I am now pointed in the right direction. I have never felt like I was pointed in the right direction. I am grateful to alcohol in that respect. I don't like some of the harm (it) has caused to some of the people I see. We'll see how it goes.

This is a funny twist, huh Lee? I never ever would have expected to be talking like this when we were in college. It is pretty crazy but it is wonderful. I appreciate this talk.  
(laughing).

L: You are taking quite a stand against alcohol. I hear the words you are using and they sound definite and very full of meaning.

R: Alcohol had a hold of my life for a long time. I say "had" because it did have a hold. I am over it. It "was" in my life. I have given myself to God and have given the problem

of alcohol over to him also. In this way I am free from the bondage of alcohol and can live my own life.

There were three items I wanted to accomplish in the interview. The first one was I wanted to actually work with Ralph and see if I could journey with him to a new understanding of meaningfulness and connection with himself, God, his family, and society. Second I wanted to help Ralph through this interview to uncover the multi-layered story of his life's journey with alcohol, and third I wanted to be able to reflect on the interview and learn from the process. I enjoyed utilizing what I learned in narrative therapy during this interview. I was very careful, perhaps too careful, to choose my questions which would elicit an emphasis on the discourse about alcohol- that is, the set of ideas that Ralph had and the ideas and contexts which defined the limits on his thinking about and relating to alcohol (Winslade and Smith 1997, 163). One of my limitations during this interview was my lack of transparency as I struggled with sticking to my list of questions.

There were two sparkling moments, which I felt very good about. The first one was for myself when I thought that I needed to check in with Ralph and see how he was doing. We had been talking for about an hour at that point and I was getting tired and I realized he was also. At one point during the counseling session I asked him "how he felt about me writing this down?" He responded that he was fine with it and that, "I was helping him more than I would ever know." This was a great affirmation for me that my approach was going well. I felt good that I was able to give him an opportunity to retell his story. I know that he has probably retold his story many times in AA. However, I

assume no one has been quite as succinct and pointed in an interview as I was being. I was reflecting on the fact that every retelling of the story is another layer unfolded in their life. There was, perhaps, a layer of his story that hadn't surfaced before.

The second sparkling moment was for Ralph when he began to speak directly to alcohol. I encouraged him to focus on the externalization of alcohol and treat alcohol as a problem he could talk to. He says at the beginning that he doesn't know what to say. He then follows with the words, "you are repulsive." This is a great break-through for Ralph because he was able to restory his old narrative of alcohol controlling his life and he created a counterplot through a discussion with his problem. The counterplot is when a shift takes place in a person's thinking and the person then sees the issues in a new light. In Ralph's situation, his counterplot was when he was able to distinguish alcohol as "repulsive" and that *he* was not repulsive.

One of the questions I had ready was one which would help him in mapping-the – influence of the problem on him. Mapping the influence helps the person to identify the problem's sphere of influence in the behavioral, emotional, physical, interactional, and attitudinal areas (White and Epston 1990,42). I asked this question when I said, "tell me how alcohol used to get the best of you before." I wanted to hear him use his own context as we looked at the influence of alcohol on him. He responded that he was able to overcome alcohol on a daily basis by going to AA meetings. This is a great breakthrough for both of us because I felt my question was relevant and he was able to think about alcohol in a way he had not before.

At one point in the interview I realized that Ralph and I were already right in the middle of deconstructing his story. Ralph moves into the discussion of how alcohol was

passed down to him genetically. I personally know that the German side of his family are heavy drinkers. I wanted to hear how he perceived that this impacted his current drinking. I wanted to hear him move on though, and own the fact that he was drinking. I believe the modernistic approach would have been to say, “yes that is bad the way alcohol has come into your life from your family.” However, my narrative approach was to say, “Can you tell me how drinking affects you on a daily basis?” With this type of question I made alcohol become external to him and he then could have control over it. Another resource I wanted to explore with Ralph was his family’s involvement with alcohol. One way I was able to work with Ralph regarding his family was with questions about his genogram.

The use of genograms in narrative is a great resource. Genograms allow the alcoholic to recreate his or her family line on paper with special details recalling ages, marriages, births, and deaths. When Ralph started talking about his family being alcoholics I began to reflect on the benefit of genograms. I began to sense that Ralph’s fear was that he was an alcoholic just like his dad. I also began to hear him say that he was afraid for his children that they would become alcoholics. I knew that this interview could possibly be seen as a “one time only situation” but I was truly utilizing my experience near listening so I could hear his version of the problem and try to find a way to short-circuit the progression (McGoldrick 1999, 26). I hope that as our friendship grows, I will be able to continue in dialogue with him about this whole problem. I do wonder how the boundaries will shape up since I wouldn’t be doing it as an assignment.

As I moved through the interview I went right into what Lynn Hoffman calls “deliberate ignorance” (Winslade and Smith 1997, 302). Ralph spoke as the expert

throughout the interview. Since he has the background of being president of a construction company, he has about him a certain air which projects confidence. While he was explaining his own position about the difference between becoming an alcoholic through his genes, and the fact that he chose to “alter his body,” I was constantly aware of allowing him to be the expert. I called him the expert and a couple of times I mentioned that we were journeying through this telling of the story together. Before I started the interview I told him that I was doing a paper in narrative therapy and I wanted to interview him about any problem he was having. Through the set up of the scenario, I felt that the underlying consciousness of both of us was that I was in charge and that he was not the expert. To help both of us through that (or just me if that was the case) I referenced his own indigenous knowledge as he was the expert.

To continue on with Hoffman’s theory of narrative therapy as a collaborative approach rather than a family systems “hidden” approach, I set up the interview, structured the interview, and ended the interview as what she called “an accidental ethnographer” (Hoffman 1990, 11). Through this approach Ralph and I were both more free to let the conversation emerge, rather than have the conversation conform to “objective” standards. I have fully adopted this approach in my own practice at the Boston Christian Counseling Center where I see clients. I never know if I will be seeing clients again, so we talk about what needs to be talked about during the session.

I believe the dominant story with Ralph was that alcoholism was tolerated in his family. The story progressed through his family’s generations that it was ok to be an alcoholic because it was in the genes. Whether or not it was tolerated because of his genes, the problem for Ralph, was that it was interfering with his marriage and alienating



him from his three children. Therefore, I wanted him to see that Ralph was living in the here and now and it was not his generations that were being afflicted, it was Ralph, today, being afflicted. Also, if he was able to externalize alcohol and literally deconstruct the assault alcohol has had on his family's generations, then his three children might not be looking toward a future life of alcoholism like their father and grandfather. This does not mean that his three sons are not being affected by the alcoholism in their family. They one day will be adult children of an alcoholic. Right now they are children of an alcoholic. Fortunately, their father was able to see the harm alcoholism was causing in his family and get help. After we talked about how alcohol affected him, I talked about how he saw God in his relationships and journey.

From my ministry at the Boston Christian Counseling Center, I know that spirituality is central to the clients. I had one client attempt to "grill" me on my own faith journey during the telephone intake. Obviously God was going to be a topic during our therapy session together, perhaps even be right in the center. In the same light, I know that Ralph, because he knows I am a minister, had God in the center of this interview. As Ralph and I journeyed through his story together I was remembering the experiences of constraints, which were defined in Griffith's article. She said that experiences with God in the therapy session can be limited both by "proscriptive constraints" that this God-talk is not to be spoken of here, and by "prescriptive constraints"-that God can and should be spoken of here, but only in a certain way (Griffith 1995, 124).

Through checking in and making sure I was being *experience near* to what Ralph was saying, I was able to move beyond these two proscriptive and prescriptive constraints. I moved into the area of "descriptive" possibilities, which opened up space in a way that

God could be brought into the conversation. At one point in the interview Ralph asks me what I think about God. I was hesitant about telling him what I thought, because I didn't want to put any constraints on his description of God. My first reaction was to respond with the question, "I hear my description of God is a concern to you, can you tell me why that is?" What I did follow through with was a transparency, which ultimately opened up the conversation to both of our descriptions of God (Griffith 1995, 129). This openness led him to discuss his thoughts about God and in his case of alcoholism, led him to the life or death question on page eight, "The question is do you want God bad enough (to accept him over alcohol and save your life, both spiritually and physically)?"

As Ralph continues his story about how he viewed God, I couldn't help but think that there was more to his understanding. I appreciate the experience of Ana-Marie Rizzuto and her writings of Freud where he focused exclusively on the father as the source of the God representation (Rizzuto 1979, 50). As Ralph was describing God as angry, I now reflect on his father and remember times when he was angry with Ralph. As Ralph's reflection of "not loving and kind" was talked about, I remember moments when Ralph did something wrong and I could see his father took a stern punishment approach rather than a corrective healing approach to the wrong committed.

I feel Ralph, through his very accurate descriptions of God in our conversation, felt at one point in his life that God was punishing. The unique outcome of the narrative theory is that Ralph came to know God as a loving God, and one who provides hope in the middle of the journey, which he is now traveling through. I also know that since he has been going to AA, he is connected and living with his dad and mother and they do have a

loving relationship. As he continues on the 12 step process of AA, his sense of meaningfulness will continue to grow as he journeys along the path of his new story.

To conclude my discussion of narrative theory, as a fantastic spiritual resource for the pastoral care and counseling of an alcoholic, I will summarize the use of narrative in fostering meaningfulness in an alcoholic's life. The typical language used in literature about alcohol counseling has a distinct modernistic ring about it. It is laced with medical metaphors such as diagnosis, assessment, treatment, and recovery that connect it with the kind of scientific discourse by which knowledge is validated in many fields of psychology in the twentieth century (Winslade and Smith 1997, 159).

One of the results of this has been the establishment in the public mind of the concept of alcoholism as a "disease." Some people who use this terminology advocate that alcohol counseling falls within a medical discourse. This is widely characterized by the use of the word *treatment*. Winslade and Smith do not say that the use of this word is wrong, and they acknowledge that for many people it has been a life-saving idea that helped them bring about significant changes in their relationship with alcohol. However, what they do dispute is the extension of a useful idea into a statement of universal truth. The use of the above metaphors and certain terminology create dominance in an alcoholic's life and can prevent other stories from seeing the light of day. This dominant story cannot be restructured, therefore, meaningfulness in the alcoholic's life cannot be reconstructed. In the article *Countering Alcoholic Narratives*, Kenneth Gergen says that the term alcoholic is an example of a description that has the potential to transform a person from a responsible subject to an object of medical-psychological practice.

The use of narrative therapy is an endeavor to avoid such deficit language altogether. Narrative also seeks to foster and call forth alternative and local knowledge about how to deal with alcohol problems rather than rely narrowly on the stories and metaphors that have been favored by their establishment as scientific truth. Some of the advantages of using the narrative approach to bring about an alcoholic's meaningfulness in his or her life are to look at:

- ❖ The many conflicting messages about alcohol that circulate in various communities.
- ❖ The effects of the normalization of alcohol and the effects on people of the definitions of "normal" patterns of alcohol use.
- ❖ The impact of commonly held notions, such as "alcoholic," on the counseling process itself.
- ❖ The opening up of space for descriptions of self that are not subsumed by the description that "alcohol trouble" brings (Winslade and Smith 1997, 161)

Pastoral counseling through the narrative approach creates open space for a person to talk about how alcohol has affected their life. Meaning is brought into a person's life as their story is reconstructed and they realize that they do not have to be controlled by alcohol. Rather, they are in charge of their own life and they are in control. Stories have an influence in our lives as we devote our attention to them. These same stories, as we look at how they influenced our lives and become aware of their dominance in our lives, can in turn be transformative and healing. With transformation, comes meaning and connection with God and ourselves.

## **A NOTE ABOUT ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS AND CONCLUSION**

*Then the eyes of both of them were opened,*

*And they knew that they were naked.*

*Genesis 3:7*

We see meaninglessness and disconnection from each other and God in the Biblical Wisdom. This starts off scripture as seen in the story of the fall. There is the same understanding of profound alienation and brokenness of human beings as there is for the full restoration of meaningfulness and increasing connection with God and with each other. We have a deep need and longing to internalize the image of God, yet we seem to find some way to hurt our own growth and often the growth of others. The story of the “fall” from the innocent image of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is a poetic way of communicating the fact that we are alienated from the image of God, which is our goal of wholeness. To minister to the many different types of human brokenness I encountered in the Boston Christian Counseling Center, The New England Baptist Hospital, and in the military, I needed all of these spiritual resources that I have named in this thesis. There is still one more spiritual resource to discuss, which I will conclude with.

One of the threads of this thesis, in addition to searching for meaningfulness and connectedness through spiritual resources, has been the benefit of the program Alcoholics Anonymous. Pastoral Counselors can learn vital lessons from academic education, their own faith groups, and from groups like Alcoholics Anonymous. The primary spiritual

resource of AA is equipping and empowering people to *serve others*, this is an essential goal of all religiously motivated counseling. The first thing, which happens to a newcomer in an AA meeting, is he or she is assigned a sponsor.

I attended a meeting of AA so I could write from first hand knowledge. When I arrived at the meeting, I was warmly greeted and engaged in conversation. I felt a very loving presence and acceptance by the members. I was immediately caught off guard by the greeting of, "Welcome to our fellowship." I thought to myself how this sounds just like my home church in San Pedro, CA. The setting was: A warm greeting, coffee and donuts over in the corner, and a message to get out to the attendees; this setting was the same as my home church. The "Alcoholic" who led the meeting on that day asked if there were any new people attending the meeting. Among others who spoke up with their name and followed by "I'm an alcoholic," I spoke up and said, "I'm Lee and I am here for the first time." They all gave me a resounding, "Hi Lee." I didn't have any pressure to say anything else, nor were there any expectations. This meeting experience was a very good one for me and gave me good insight into the recovery program of AA. During the meeting I heard the words: Hopelessness, unworthy, devalued, and void of meaning (meaninglessness). As the program went on and alcoholics gave their story I could see how the retelling of their stories, and the inclusion of their Higher Power, brought about meaning and hope in each one of their lives.

The New Testament clearly indicates that continuing growth towards wholeness involves self-transcendence and self-investment in the growth and healing of others. This principle of "growth through outreach" is found in Matthew 16:25, "For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." Taking this

scriptural passage in present day context tells us that if someone hoards the wholeness that he or she has achieved narcissistically, it will diminish over time. However, if you invest yourself in helping others to grow, your own wholeness will flower. Alcoholics Anonymous aims at becoming a supportive community where all members find their Higher Power. In AA people find the motivation, insights, and strength to be healing agents to those in need. AA is a spiritual resource because it releases people to use their healing and growth in a loving and freely chosen service to other people in need.

Howard Clinebell states that the “growth formula” is a combination of: First, healing love – the muscular love that brings together caring and second, confrontation. These two elements in the “growth formula” for wholeness are essential in all pastoral care and counseling (Clinebell 1966, 56). Growth occurs in any relationship when one experiences both accepting love and honest confrontation. In the AA program, movement towards greater wholeness and meaningfulness is nurtured in us when someone cares enough to speak the truth in love to us. When this is felt in our inner soul, then this feeling enables us to experience something of both the love that does not need to be earned (grace) and caring honesty (judgment). AA is an entire process by which wholeness is facilitated in relationships. This is illustrated by Ephesians 4:15, “Let us speak the truth in love; so shall we fully grow up into Christ.” This verse leads me into further reflection on my own ministry.

As I look back on my ministry during the twelve years since my ordination, it seems that I have generally tended to offer my congregation, in which ever form, a program. I have followed suggestions from books and from professors, and believed I was “doing” the right thing.

As I compare my early ministry with that of the last few years, I sense that what I feel inside of me and that which I offer now is not what I do, but rather *who I am*. There is something that flows from me, an inner peace and harmony, which is so much a part of these pages. My ministry is simply the way I am. These pages are expressing my own experiential spiritual life. I have tried other forms of ministry, but these pages express my essence and my approach to pastoral care of others. I believe that I am “being” the right thing, and that this is the most normal ministry I can offer. I turn again to Thomas Merton to express perhaps more clearly how I feel about this paper and about ministry in general. Merton’s words of contemplation express spiritual growth through the use of our gifts from the Holy Spirit as well as personal growth towards wholeness and meaning.

Why do we think the gift of contemplation, infused contemplation, and mystical prayer, as something essentially strange and esoteric, reserved for a small class of almost unnatural beings and prohibited to everyone else?

It is perhaps because we have forgotten that contemplation is the work of the Holy Ghost acting on our souls through His gifts of Wisdom and Understanding, with special intensity to increase and perfect our love for Him. These gifts are part of the normal equipment of Christian sanctity. They are given to all in Baptism, and if they are given, it is presumably because God wants them to be developed.

God often measures His gifts by our desire to receive them, and by our cooperation with His grace. The Holy Spirit will not waste any of His gifts on people who have little or no interest in them. Contemplation is the work of love, and nothing is more effective in increasing our love for God (Merton 1950, 7).

I believe alcoholics continue to grow in connection and meaning, just as Merton talks about in his quote. What is beautiful is the fact that through recovery, alcoholics are no longer frantically searching for the next drink, they are journeying through the process of



continuing to grow and discover a deeper relationship with God. When I think about personal growth I reflect on the personal growth images of the Bible in the book of Psalms. Clinebell, in his chapter on “Biblical Bases” in *Pastoral Care and Counseling*, says that these images of Psalms show unmistakably that wholeness and meaningfulness were understood as a goal one journeys towards. The Old Testament shows that wholeness is not a static goal that can be achieved once and for all, or at a distinct moment in time. Rather it is a process. There is a wonderful image from Psalm 1:3 which describes this continuing growth process. Let me add the words *a whole person*, “Is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in season.” This verse is appropriate here because it reminds me of the seasons of life that an alcoholic journeys through, just like the fruit bearing tree produces and then goes dormant during the seasons.

The three spiritual resources, which I talk about in this thesis have helped me gain a better understanding of my own self. They have also made a dynamic difference in the way I have been able to minister to patients in the hospital bed of The Baptist as well as at the Boston Christian Counseling Center. The resource of healing of memories has been instrumental in my ability to talk with an alcoholic who had been scarred by an event in their past. Through guiding a person back through their memory, I was able to work with that event as well as their unconscious and start them on their journey of healing. Although they were not fully healed in body, they were able to find meaning in their life. I constantly recall the loving and cautionary words of Norma Burton who said, “If you are going to bring memories back with someone, you have to be there with them to help them through their journey.” These are awesome words of responsibility for me.

Through my internships at the New England Baptist Hospital and the Boston Christian Counseling Center, I have started the humbling journey of meeting this responsibility. I will continue to work on my own pastoral counseling skills to better serve God's people.

I used the resource of Prayer and Meditation specifically as a ministry in the hospital setting. After beginning a conversation with a patient, I would find out that he or she was a recovering alcoholic. In addition to how their surgery went and how they were feeling in the bed, I asked them how their 12 steps were going. I talked with them about their Higher Power and how their prayer life was. I would also offer to lead them in a centering prayer as I mentioned in Chapter 2. Often, this was the first time they had ever been guided in this type of prayer. They had prayed before, but they never knew this style. When we finished some of the people I prayed with said they were refreshed because of their new connection with God. Others were not able to connect with God or their Higher Power but appreciated the experience. The experience itself provided connection with peace in their lives. Prayer and meditation was a resource, which I was able to leave them with in the hospital bed. I look forward to expanding my ministry of contemplative prayer and meditation with alcoholics to include other types of prayer including lament and petitionary prayer.

The resource of narrative theory is indeed a re-authoring of my own counseling experience with alcoholics. My counseling session with Ralph was life changing for me, and my recognition of my ability as a pastoral counselor to help others. I learned a great deal about the style of narrative and what a beautiful process the listening for "unique outcomes" was with Ralph. I plan on continuing my study of narrative theory and learning more through the practice and supervision in clinical settings. Using narrative

theory with alcoholics in the Boston Christian Counseling Center was easier than in the hospital settings because the client came in for counseling. Therefore, the client was willing to journey with me through the reconstruction of their story, while the patient I visited in the hospital was there to physically recover. There was no contract with the patient in the hospital bed. However, in both settings I was able to use the listening skills associated with narrative and bring about gleanings for the client or patient, whether or not that person had a problem with alcohol in their life.

Basil Pennington talks about centering prayer as a prayer of experience and we can only know it by experience. The same light shines on my understanding of the theme throughout this work. My journey of experiencing ministry in the form of pastoral care to alcoholics using these 3 spiritual resources can only be enhanced by more experience. It is my simple prayer of humility that God will continue to be my source of love, life, peace, happiness and meaning as I work with alcoholics in the future. Through the Holy Spirit's guidance I also pray that I will be able to bring the same qualities into their lives.

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